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The great public libraries debate: Do bricks and mortar still matter?

A case study of Canada Water Library, Southwark, London examining current attitudes to a modern library space.

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine in depth a newly-built modern public library to gain insight into attitudes to and perceptions of a modern library space in 2014. It used as a starting point a previous study carried out in 2005 and published by Black (2011) which gathered Mass Observation Archive data on public perceptions of public library buildings at the start of the 21st century. This study aimed to evaluate attitudes a decade on to determine if physical public library spaces still matter.

A single case study methodology was used to add detail to the extant general literature on public libraries and provide insight into current attitudes to a purpose-built library in the heart of a community and how it meets users' needs and expectations. A printed questionnaire looking at the library's location, design and use of space was handed out to a sample of users.

The results show that the physical library is still important to users who are proud of how it looks and the contribution it makes to their local community and area. The findings also show that the case study library is meeting the needs of its diverse user groups very well by providing access to resources, support, IT and space.

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Abbreviations

ACE	– Arts Council England
BREEAM	– Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology
CABE	– Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
CPLIS	– Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society
CILIP	– Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
CIPFA	– Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
CWL	– Canada Water Library
DMCS	– Department for Media, Culture and Sport
IFLA	– International Federation of Library Associations
MOA	– Mass Observation Archive
MLA	– Museums, Libraries and Archives council
OCLC	– Online Computer Library Center
RIBA	– Royal Institute of British Architects
SCL	– Society of Chief Librarians

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In a year when the UK public voted the Library of Birmingham their favourite new building from the RIBA Stirling Prize shortlist in a BBC poll, fending off competition from high-profile commercial buildings like The Shard in London ([BBC](#), 2014), this study will investigate why public libraries are still regarded as important places. 2014 is also the year in which the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the UK government's overseer of public libraries and the Department for Communities and Local Government jointly commissioned a large-scale consultation to record public perceptions of the role and future of libraries, the results of which were published in a full independent report in December (DCMS/Sieghart, 2014.)

The report acknowledges "the unique physical place that libraries occupy" and concludes that "despite the growth in digital technologies, there is still a clear need and demand within communities for modern, safe, non-judgemental, flexible spaces, where citizens of all ages can mine the knowledge of the world for free, supported by the help and knowledge of the library workforce." So bricks and mortar do matter?

There has been a renaissance in public library architecture and the public's perception of it which has led to 'modern libraries' being redefined. 'Modern' libraries were until recently synonymous with purpose-built public libraries of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s which seemed to be universally derided and frowned upon as distinct from the well-loved traditional libraries of the Carnegie era – widely regarded as the golden age of public libraries. The proliferation of 'statement' libraries over the last decade in particular has contributed to a more positive attitude to modern libraries. Imposing and inspiring 'flagship' libraries like Brighton's Jubilee library, Peckham library and more recently, the Library of Birmingham are all examples of UK public libraries which are changing and challenging public attitudes to modern libraries in particular and public libraries in general.

Evidence from the library and information science (LIS) literature and from independent and government reports and reviews suggests that new, purpose-built libraries both in the UK and internationally are contributing to changing public attitudes to and perceptions of public libraries. By making a commitment to building new public libraries, the public values them as an asset, is proud of them and believes they have a vital role to play in providing access to information resources and technology, in providing welcoming places to read, study and work in and in the regeneration of local areas and communities. Against a backdrop of library closures, funding cuts, low lending and visitor statistics across the public library sector, which has prompted the library profession and the library and information science (LIS) scholarly community to evaluate and debate the present and future purpose of public libraries, investment in new 'statement' libraries and library renovation projects offers some hope.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to examine in depth one example of a newly built library in the UK – Canada Water Library (CWL) in the London borough of Southwark – to provide evidence of current attitudes to and perceptions of a modern purpose-built library space. Using a case study method, it will collect and evaluate users' attitudes to library design (the library as a built form, the library as 'place') as well as 'libraryness' (the importance of collections and services in public libraries and their wider social and community function.) It will also contextualise the limited findings of the case study research in the broader debate on the role of public libraries today by reviewing the extant literature and drawing on one study in particular by Black (2011) which analysed Mass Observation Archive (MOA) data gathered

in 2005 from ordinary members of the public on how they felt about public libraries at that time. It is hoped that the findings of the research will provide a contemporary and singular viewpoint a decade on to evaluate if and how attitudes are changing and reflect on the extent to which new public libraries are succeeding in meeting users' needs.

1.2 Scope and context

The scope of this dissertation is largely defined by its case study methodology. It will offer a limited yet unique insight into one modern public library in order to contribute to the research into public libraries both historically and in recent years as their role, relevance and significance has evolved and as investment in new library builds has flourished.

Within LIS, public libraries offer a unique perspective on evolving popular trends in and attitudes to reading, books, e-books, digital information, the broad role of the library, universal access to services, technologies and facilities, public spaces in general and so on, and as such, continue to serve as a useful barometer of library trends in general.

Research into 'the library as place' is extensive in the LIS and social sciences literature and covers academic, school, professional, special and public libraries. It also covers a wide range of aspects from historical studies of how library spaces, collections and services have evolved, the challenges they face in the digital information age, contemporary ethnographic and observational studies of use and division of space, hybrid and virtual library models and so on.

This dissertation will provide a brief overview of the extant literature on public libraries from general texts on public libraries, the library design and architecture literature and non-scholarly reports reviews and recommendations from government and other stakeholders in the library debate. It will identify key themes and reflect on if public library spaces are still needed, what is their role and function? It will also discuss the challenges facing public libraries especially in the digital information age and evaluate present and future trends for libraries. This review will focus primarily on public libraries in the UK though will draw on an international perspective where relevant and helpful to this research and will specifically consider libraries which have been newly or recently built.

It will also summarise and analyse the MOA data which formed the basis for Black's (2011) study on attitudes to public library buildings in the UK and include a case study narrative of CWL based on observational visits and the library's own literature and web resources.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The main objectives of this research are: to summarise and build on the 2005 'Public Library Buildings Directive' data from Black's (2011) study in order to provide a contemporary viewpoint on the topic; to add to the limited research into public library buildings and architecture as identified by Black (2011); to gain insights into their importance to users by gathering meaningful user data which is often under-represented in empirical research into public libraries (many studies focus on views of library practitioners and other stakeholders); to carry out an in-depth exploration of a single case study library to investigate whether its physical space (the building itself, the spaces within, the services that are provided within it) matter and if it is meeting users' needs and expectations; to provide an example of 'good practice' which may be of benefit to future research into public libraries and public library spaces

or to inform future library projects. It also aims to place the findings from the case study in the wider context and debate of public libraries.

Broad research questions such as: do public libraries still matter? Are physical library spaces still important to users and if so, why? What are users using the space for? What aspects are important to them? When new libraries are built, do they work? Do they make a difference and do they succeed in meeting their users' needs? were formulated into a user questionnaire which would be easy to administer and distribute and that would produce meaningful data from the case study library users. A combination of open and closed questions and opportunities for free-text responses were used to gather a mix of quantitative and qualitative data.

2. Literature review

The review of the literature carried out for this dissertation had two main aims. The first was to build upon Black's (2011) study's own excellent appraisal of the literature on public libraries and specifically, public library buildings at the start of the 21st century and the second was to provide a justifiable context to this research, using as a starting point, Black's (2011, p31) evaluation that there is a gap in LIS research into public library architecture and buildings and their perceived value and importance to the public with much of the research into the public library as "place" focusing on the social aspects of public library spaces and their "social capital." Fisher et al (2007, p136) also identify a lack of a "robust framework for analysing the role of libraries in terms of "place"" in LIS and argue that though the literature often focuses on the diverse values attributed to libraries, they are often not "systematically documented."

Four common themes were identified across the extant literature on public library spaces from the broad LIS literature to the more specific library design and architecture literature to reports, consultations and policy documents commissioned and published by the many stakeholders in public libraries – evidence of and arguments for public library buildings as valuable and valued assets, discussion of the myriad challenges facing the physical library in the digital information era we now live in, constructive and evidence-based guidance on how public libraries can and must remain relevant and their changing role as a social/community/learning space and as a facilitating space for the digital needs of the public, and finally, recommendations for and examples of the kinds of spaces required to meet the changing needs and expectations of their users. Each of these themes is explored in brief below to provide context to this research.

2.1 Public library buildings as 'visible' assets

McMenemy (2009), Usherwood (2007), Brophy (2007) and Molz and Dain (2001) provide useful insights into public library buildings and the perceived value of public library physical spaces within their broader explorations of "the public library" from a contemporary 21st century perspective and in the "future of libraries" discourse. The view that public library buildings are intrinsically bound together with how the public perceive the public library service is also discussed widely in the LIS literature and beyond. McMenemy (2009, p 190), in a chapter entitled 'Marketing, branding and buildings,' argues that public library buildings are *the* most valuable 'visible' asset to promoting the public library brand and that the physical condition of both a building and its contents can have "an immense impact on users." Brophy (2007) echoes this point and argues that because public libraries are always under pressure to demonstrate their value (real and perceived), a new library building can affect its impact in a positive way, using recent projects such as Norfolk and Norwich Millenium Library and Peckham Library in Southwark as examples of library spaces which are inspiring and encouraging new users and are contributing to a renewed sense of pride in the public library service, at least on a micro, local level.

McDonald (2012, p39) highlights the positive impact a new library building can have on visitor numbers and as a driver for library use, citing Newcastle City Library which opened in 2009 where a 200% increase in use was reported and Tower Hamlets where library visits quadrupled from 1998 to 2011, following the opening of the Idea Stores. Annual CIPFA data repeatedly confirm this by providing statistics which show that the majority of UK's top 20 busiest libraries for visits and loans are new library buildings, this year's top three visited libraries being Norwich, Woolwich and Brighton's Jubilee Library which were all built in the last decade (CIPFA, 2014.) Evidence also suggests that a new library building

can increase footfall beyond the library to local shops, town and city centres to kickstart a wider community regeneration (DCMS/Sieghart, 2014; McDonald, 2012, p39, Black and Pepper, 2012; McLaren, 2013.)

McMenemy (2009, p 194) points out that the reinvigoration for library building was boosted by private sector funding through the UK government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) which led to a number of flagship libraries being built in major cities in the UK and Usherwood (2007, p 2) contextualises this renaissance in library building in the UK at the start of the 21st century with the former advisory body for libraries, the Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) council's 2006 report on the state of the public library estate in the UK as a whole. It concluded that nearly a third of public library buildings at the start of the new millennium were not fit for purpose. It also coincided with Tim Coates's (2004) widely cited and damning prediction that public libraries would be obsolete by 2020. This proliferation of new library buildings is a "vote of confidence in libraries as monuments to cultural heritage, free exchange of ideas, public enterprise, the value of information and also architectural ambitions." (Molz and Dain, 2001, p 209)

MORI research into perceptions of libraries published in 2002 also contributed to the growing clamour documented by Usherwood (2007) and others to update library buildings and services for the new century. It is a rich source of qualitative and quantitative user survey data from across the UK which reinforced the public perception of public libraries as outdated and under-funded and called for more modern and welcoming buildings, newer books and better facilities like cafes and dedicated children's areas (MORI/Audit Commission, 2002.)

Niegaard (2011, p 176) argues that new public library buildings are not just an asset to the public library service, as McMenemy and others suggest, but are "library buildings which by their design, layout, and urban location are able to establish the library as a powerful asset in the development of the twenty-first-century knowledge society and in the strengthening of democratic society." Fisher et al's (2007, p145) case study of the newly built Seattle Central Library provides evidence of a library whose physical building "becomes a statement" in the eyes of the public and one which symbolises a bold commitment to a public institution in challenging economic times.

The library design and architecture literature reiterates the point that these 'statement' libraries "contribute to the vitality and viability of the communities they serve. The impact of striking, almost sculptural facades has transformed and uplifted the image of the public library which has resulted in a significant increase in architectural awards for this type of project" (Smith and Flannery, 2007, p7.) Khan (2009, p6) also comments that libraries continue to function as "a statement of a knowledge-driven society" and points to the increasing importance of library buildings as visitor attractions or "destination libraries." Niegaard (2011, p 178) refers to these architecturally significant library buildings as "lighthouses" of cultural attraction. In spite of their popularity with the public and scholars, Worpole (2004, p 100) is one of the few to express concerns that this new wave of brash and bold public library designs might, in fact, confuse and diminish the perceived role of libraries and what he refers to as the "historic recognisability" of public library buildings.

This theme of public library buildings as valued asset is also explored in the many reports, reviews and consultations on public libraries and all add welcome detail to the debate on why the buildings themselves matter from the various stakeholders outside the scholarly LIS community. Black (2011, p31) provides an excellent analysis of those published up to 2010. More recent reports are reviewed in brief here.

The MLA/Arts Council *What the public want from libraries?* report (2010, p69) based on MORI user and non-user research found that public library spaces continue to be valued highly as “neutral” public spaces and that for the public there is rarely a distinction between the physical library building and ‘the library service’ – “Although our research aimed to explore library services in a wide sense - including online services - most people still thought of a physical building when they thought about libraries.”

CILIP’s recent survey of public library authorities, suggests that public library buildings are equally valued by practitioners, with changes to library spaces either through modernisation of existing libraries or the building of new library spaces listed as the top two service developments reported by the authorities surveyed, ahead of expansion of ebook or ejournal services or investment in technological infrastructure like RFID or self-service or expansion of wifi provision (CILIP, 2012 p 19.) The Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) report published in July 2014 reiterates this. “In an increasingly digital world, physical spaces for sharing become more needed and more precious... as many other institutions reduce their physical presence (in response to digital and financial imperatives) the physical aspect of public libraries increasingly becomes their most compelling unique feature” (2014, p 5.)

The most recently published independent review based on a consultation commissioned jointly by DMCS and Department of Communities and Local Government paints a picture of a public library service at a crossroads but where “libraries are among the most valued of civic spaces” which must continue to “provide access to books, online resources, workforce training, support and space,” underlining once more that the physical public library building is a key component in delivering a 21st century public library offering (DCMS/Sieghart, 2014, p 18 and 25.)

2.2 Bricks vs clicks – the impact of digital on public libraries

In his article in the IFLA publication *Libraries as Places: Buildings for the 21st Century*, Dowlin (2004, p 11) helpfully summarises the extant literature on the future of library buildings as one which will be “bi-polar” encompassing either “bricks” or “clicks” in the new digital era. However, he himself advocates strongly the view that the virtual library alone exists nowhere and that “the physical presence is still critical to library success” predicting that the successful library of the future will be some form of hybrid library which will encompass both bricks *and* clicks.

Molz and Dain (2001, p207) argue that institutions like public libraries have great staying power and that “even in the digital information age, people with similar interests and special skills cluster together in real space,” adding that “most people today are not ready to cede real civic space to flickering cyberspace, to yield the brick to the byte.” (p 209.) Dahlkild (2011, p 33) crucially argues that in the post-millennium, digital and new media era, when the notion of “libraries without walls” challenged the traditional library’s physical importance, it has, in fact, “heightened an international interest in the library as physical space,” spawning more innovative and creative library projects, of the kind discussed previously. Dahlkild (p 11) also provides an excellent historical appraisal of how both library architecture and design, and the discourse around it, have evolved and responded to change and offers this positive, contemporary viewpoint: “The increasing number of library buildings and the development of library space are part of a greater accessibility of information, the opening of the organisation of knowledge and the creating of a public sphere.”

Countless other recent papers examine the particular digital challenges facing public libraries and assess the impact of the internet, specifically, on the need for physical public library spaces at all. Vakkari (2012) outlines the first major study of public library users in Finland which found that the use of the internet for a range of study, work, everyday and leisure activities is not threatening or replacing public

library use for the same purposes, but complementing it. Similarly, Aabø (2005, p 7) argues that continued assessment of the value of public libraries in economic as well as social and cultural terms to demonstrate their importance is vital but concludes that their essential purpose is unchanged by the “ICT revolution.”

LIS journal *Library Trends* dedicated an entire issue to the library as built form in 2011 in which Black and Dahlkild (p 1) propose that as an ICT itself, the public library building has expertly negotiated the digital age as it has other disruptive economic and socio-cultural developments over time. “The physical library refuses to go away,” they argue, because of its adaptability and flexibility to accommodate new technologies and respond to changing demands and attitudes.

The challenges of the digital era and its impact on public libraries are also acknowledged in the library design literature (Smith and Flannery, 2007 and 2014; Khan, 2009; Worpole, 2013.) “The knowledge revolution and the need for lifelong learning poses new challenges for architects and designers” (Smith and Flannery, 2007, p 7.) The impact of new technologies as well as digital information – from ebooks to electronic journals, newspapers and magazines to the wider web – has required changes to be made to layout, use and allocation of space as well as to interior fixtures and furnishings. Khan (2009, p 6) argues that libraries have always dealt with changes in technologies well and that far from sounding the death knell for libraries, how best to handle digital information – from storage to access to dissemination – is being acknowledged, explored and embraced by new library design thinking to meet the changing needs and expectations of 21st century library users.

2.3 The evolving role(s) of public libraries and why is physical space needed at all?

There is plenty of evidence in the recent literature to suggest that the LIS scholarly community, perhaps not surprisingly, still sees a bright future for public libraries as physical places. The library as “a physical collection and a set of physically located services still needs to be taken seriously in thinking about how a library service is to be delivered in the 21st century” (Brophy, 2007, p 107.) The DCMS *Framework for the Future* report set out the government’s vision for the future of public libraries in England, the cornerstone of which was the widely-held view that “libraries are places: their tangible look and feel still matter hugely to people” (DCMS, 2003, p 22.) But why?

Mainka et al (2013) in their *Libri* paper summarise the core role of public libraries as “to provide physical spaces for meeting, learning and working, as well as areas for children and other groups, in a building that is a landmark of the city.” They argue public library buildings are now part of a city’s “architainment” – buildings which attract and yield creativity and which also lead to urban cultural regeneration. As far back as 1993, Greenhalgh (p 72) predicted that the libraries of the future would still be building based though the notion of their role as “a gateway to the imagination and knowledge” was popular among the stakeholders who contributed to the Comedia report, some of whom also reflected that a physical presence would still matter though access regardless of place was also a foreseeable reality. This is echoed over two decades later by Meunier and Eigenbrodt (2014, p 221) who write that “the success of library buildings as knowledge hubs in coming decades will define the place and the role of libraries: these are the places where people can make sense of information. The added value of libraries lies in how people are enabled to find resources, exchange information and create new knowledge.”

Evidence of public library spaces as conduits for social contact, community building and engagement and as meeting places is widespread in the recent literature (MLA, 2010; Sung et al, 2013; Scott, 2011; Norman, 2012.) The OCLC (2012) survey of a relatively small sample of public librarians published as the

Snapshot of Priorities and Perspectives: UK Public Libraries report found that, even though footfall was expected to decrease, demand for the physical library was expected to increase for accessing online databases and journals and for “meetings and social gatherings,” highlighting similar trends noted elsewhere in diversification of use in public library spaces.

Brewster (2014, p94) even goes so far as to argue that public libraries are good for our health and have a vital function as a “therapeutic landscape” and as “environments not service providers,” whose welcoming, calming and empowering atmosphere can benefit people with mental health problems. Their role in creating social capital is also widely discussed (Varheim, 2007; McLaren, 2013) with many advocating that this is the primary reason why public libraries matter in the 21st century. Herein lies perhaps the greatest challenge for the public library in the 21st century – defining its core roles and branding itself effectively and clearly (Haniff and Rowley, 2011.)

2.4 What should the public library of the future look like and what kind of space(s) is needed?

The future(s) of both academic and public libraries is discussed in Hernon and Matthews (2013) looking at societal, cultural, technological and economic trends which may have an impact on them both including several possible scenarios for public libraries specifically over the next ten to fifteen years. They also provide a useful, though somewhat simplistic assessment of the “future of libraries” literature and identify common threads therein including “changes to facilities based on public’s information-seeking patterns and expectations, greater community role, the library as more than a conveyor of books and staff with new skill sets.” (p 73). However, they stop short of providing real advice or solutions based on actual studies and scenarios. It is hoped that evidence from this case study will add detail and value to this kind of broad ‘blue sky’ thinking.

Bryson et al’s (2003) *Libraries should also be Buildings?* New Library Impact Study, on the other hand, is an important study which gathered rich qualitative data and presented detailed case studies of two new UK public libraries (Norwich and Stratford) to assess their impact. It concludes that the best new libraries are those which are “comfortable and safe places, cater for a wide variety of users and include both quiet, contemplative areas and spaces “to see people, be seen and carry on a conversation.”

From a library design perspective, “dedicated interior design can provide a welcoming safe space inspiring visitors to engage with the activities within” and Smith and Flannery (2007) and Worpole (2013) provide ample examples of what new library spaces look like, including international and UK projects like the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec in Montreal, the new Library of Birmingham, dubbed “the people’s palace”, Dagenham Library and Bournemouth Library.

Radical thinking about the form public libraries should take is already evident within the profession too with CILIP (2012) reporting an increase in “co-location” where public library services are provided alongside other local authority or council-run services in shared spaces. This varies from leisure centres to doctors’ surgeries and is seen by some authorities as a viable alternative to library closures as a new way of providing public library services.

The SCL report (p5) believes that “what libraries will increasingly be valued for by the public, and which is unique, is providing local physical spaces; for people to meet, read, share digital skills or equipment, make, create and learn, helped by each other and by library staff.” This proves a good starting point from which to find more anecdotal evidence by case study research of this kind to establish if this is borne out by library users themselves.

And as Meunier and Eigenbrodt (2014, p222) remind us, no matter what designers, architects, library professionals, scholars and advocates envision the public libraries of the future to be, it is library users

who will and should determine the kinds of spaces they need. “Library users have high expectations of what they will experience in our libraries: free access to knowledge and technology, assistance to retrieve and interpret specialist information, opportunities to discuss ideas with other people. All of these are complex interactions which require bespoke facilities tailored to meet users’ requirements and enable the exchange of knowledge.”

2.5 A review of the MOA ‘Public Library Buildings’ data

Black’s (2011) paper gives a summary of responses to the ‘Public Library Buildings’ directive but it was important to analyse the responses in more depth in order to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes found therein.

The Mass Observation Archive (MOA) is an open-access repository of longitudinal social research into the British public’s attitudes to all aspects of everyday life and has been a rich source of social and popular commentary since its inception in the late 1930s. A panel of over 500 anonymous volunteers are sent directives three times a year and are asked to write on the themes included therein. Recent examples include directives on ‘The Scottish Referendum’, ‘The High Street’, ‘The ‘Big Society’’ and ‘What Makes You Happy?’ The responses are then gathered and processed so that they can be made available at The Keep at the University of Sussex to researchers, academics, social historians and scientists and the wider public.

The subject of Black’s (2011) paper was the MOA Public Library Buildings Directive 76, commissioned in 2005. 227 respondents either emailed, typed or handwrote their responses to the questions set by the directive’s authors. The length of the responses varied greatly from a few lines to essay-style commentaries of two or three pages long.

Respondents were asked to think specifically about public library buildings and their architectural style as opposed to the collections, services or staff within them. However, the authors were also interested in these aspects if respondents felt they were relevant to what they had to say about the buildings themselves. The directive also asked for the views of non-users of libraries. Key questions were what they thought of the location of the library and how it fit in with its immediate environment, the exterior and interior architectural style of the library, the entrance and other areas of the building and how they made them feel; what they thought about older types of library buildings versus modern library buildings? Did they prefer them? Lastly, what were their views of older libraries which had been renovated into more modern library spaces.

The transcripts make for fascinating reading and offer a rich snapshot into the public’s perceptions of library buildings early in the new century. Black’s subsequent 2011 paper “‘We don’t do public libraries like we used to’: Attitudes to public library buildings in the UK at the start of the 21st century” summarised the responses and contextualised them in the wider debate on public library buildings in the new century. The responses were read and analysed for the purposes of this study to identify common themes therein and to inform the research instruments and output of the case study. The alphanumerical references in brackets below refer to each MOA respondent’s unique identifier.

Black’s (2011) study outlines the methodological limitations of using MOA data for research purposes. While it offers a fascinating “social autobiographical” insight into the attitudes of individual members of the public, the qualitative, essay-style nature of the responses is difficult to analyse. Some of the handwritten responses are illegible, some do not offer any commentary on public libraries at all, either because respondents were non-users of libraries or had nothing to contribute. One such respondent

admits to never having paid attention to public library buildings until he was asked about them for this directive (D1603.) One non-user expresses the view that “libraries are a thing of the past and will close down in the next 50 years” (F3178), echoing some popular literature which also predicts a gloomy future (or lack of one) for public libraries. However, another non-user while regarding modern libraries as lacking in history and too clinical, writes that “even with today’s technology, libraries remain an important part of our lives, a great place for peace and quiet” (I3189.)

The composition of the MOA’s panel of volunteers, its “representativeness”, is also criticised (Black 2011, p 34.) While the MOA itself does not claim that its panel represents a cross-section of the wider population, the evidence from the Public Library Buildings directive bears this out. Of the total number of respondents, 149 were female (66%) and 78 (34%) were male. The ages of respondents varied but two-thirds fell within the 45-64 and 65+ (66%) groups. The youngest 18-24 age group yielded the fewest contributions (4%).

The paper’s title includes a citation from a contribution which lamented the state of modern public library buildings. “That pioneering philanthropic zeal that created some of our best and most historic library buildings has long since been eroded by dullard local councillors, ‘visionary’ 60s planners who gave us insubstantial open-plan flat-roofed nightmare buildings, and penny pinching central government, who don’t have the imagination to see that public libraries are essential to the democratic process and self-advancement.” And yet, the same respondent also praised modern libraries such as Brighton’s Jubilee Library for its “visionary” design. “The new library is more than a building, it has set out to become the beating heart of the community.” (N3181)

In fact, this contribution highlights another difficulty with the MOA data – MOA respondents are often conflicted in their attitudes to public libraries which makes the responses difficult to categorise and analyse. While Black’s (2011) study divides the respondents into four broad categories – those who preferred modern, purpose-built library buildings, those who preferred older-style library buildings, those who preferred refurbished/modernised libraries in an older-style, traditional building, those who expressed no preference and thought architecture unimportant – many responses are complex and provide evidence of contradictory, dichotomous opinions. For example, respondent M1507 described older libraries as “stuffy, solemn, quiet and strictly managed” but then wrote that older library buildings were “libraries as they should be – solid, impressive, Victorian.”

The main themes that emerged were as follows. Location for many was key. A central location close to transport links, shops, high streets and other facilities was important to many respondents across all ages. Many regarded libraries which were part of shopping centres or co-located with other municipal services very positively. Convenient, well-situated and accessible were some of the key terms used when respondents described why their library’s location was important to them. “Modern libraries are and should be central to shopping and transport” (A883); Arguing for the importance of a convenient location, another respondent describes her library as “well-situated, easy to get to and near to lots of other buildings you may need/want to visit, making it handy to pop into.” (B3154.)

On the need for libraries to fit in with their surrounding areas – on high streets or alongside other buildings of different architectural styles, respondents on the whole thought they should fit in. However, mid-20th century libraries in particular were perceived very negatively as not fitting in well with their surroundings or when they did, they look just like offices or council buildings. M1979 described an “aggressively new purpose-built library [from the 1960s] which did not fit into its location and destroyed the streetscape with its uncompromising square shape.” R3546 described a 1976 library which replaced the old Victorian building and did not fit in with its surroundings. He added that he “couldn’t see the point of it and it spoiled handsome part of town.”

Design is the area which most divided people responding to the MOA directive. Modern library architecture, in particular, provoked the most vehement responses while some respondents expressed a preference for an “older-style exterior” but with a modern interior “which make the library easy to use and more accessible” (L3298.) Many described in detail modern library buildings they were familiar with which were built during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s as drab, bland, non-descript, soulless and lacking in character. Respondents also described older, Victorian/Carnegie-era libraries as forbidding, dingy, intimidating, shabby, too formal, cramped. McMenemy (2009, p194) echoes this point that discourse around traditional library architecture is often negative for many users and stakeholders. That said, others extolled them as grand, as “buildings with character”, more serious or as one respondent commented “solid, impressive, Victorian – libraries as they should be” (M1507.) Questions on design in this study were constructed to try to encapsulate the main arguments put forward in the MOA data to ascertain current attitudes to the case study library’s exterior and interior design.

Use of space in modern libraries was also a hot topic with countless strong views about their layouts, and the myriad facilities they now offer. Some observed that modern libraries seemed to equate less books (not a welcome development), with modern libraries also seemingly unable to getting the balance right between books and other resources – everything from CDs and DVDs to computers. Opinion was also divided on whether library spaces which encompass cafés and other social spaces detract from the main function of public libraries. M3295 thought that such diversification is essential for modern libraries arguing that “all libraries must diversify and exploit the fact that they really are an ideas store like one in Tower Hamlets which as well as offering traditional library services, provide adult education classes, career support, training, crèche, meeting areas, cafes, arts and leisure pursuits.” While M3469 laments that “as a community we have lost an institution with a social and educational function... Libraries seems to be striving to retain a place in what is becoming a virtual community.”

The disadvantages of open-plan layouts and the need for quiet areas and reading rooms frequently surfaced with one respondent commenting that open-plan means “no atmosphere, no quiet areas for older users to read books or look for local or family history resources.” (L3037.) Less space dedicated to books and more to CDs and computers was also seen a move in the wrong direction in too many modern libraries which MOA respondents were familiar with.

3. Methodology

3.1 Definition of case study method and research output

Pickard (2013) defines a case study as “an in-depth analysis of a single case” (p 135), the overarching purpose of which is to “provide a holistic account of the case and in-depth knowledge of the specific through rich description situated in context. This may lead to an understanding of a particular phenomenon but it is understanding the case that should be paramount” (p102.) The single instrumental case study approach used in this dissertation project allowed for a combination of desk research (background research on the subject library and reading and analysis of the MOA data at The Keep, University of Sussex) and a user survey, in this instance, a questionnaire for library users to fill in at the case study library. It also met the time-scale and scope of a dissertation project of this kind.

While case study research in libraries is by its very nature not generalisable due to the fact that “each library is a unique place shaped by factors that include the library building, its physical location, and the community it serves,” (May, 2011, p 356), case study methodology can and should still be rigorous, repeatable and transferable, which can lead to a body of evidence and knowledge on the same topic, phenomenon or research questions (Pickard, 2013 p 21.) Sequieros’s (2013, p 224) single case study of the Almeida Garrett Public Library in Oporto instantiates this: “a single case methodology makes a stake on knowledge *transferability*, creating knowledge from singular situations. Similar contexts may allow for knowledge transfer, providing there is enough *fittingness* for the produced conclusions.” Purposive sampling was used as with all case study research. In this instance, the sample was made up of users (including staff) of the case study library who were identified as the best “information-rich sources” or “key informants” for this research into users’ attitudes towards public library buildings (Pickard, 2013, 104.)

Evidence of case study research on public libraries is plentiful in the LIS literature as discussed previously and is used for two main purposes – to illustrate good or best practice within the library and information science discipline or profession or to add detail or depth to a particular research topic or debate. This case study aims to do both. It also hopes to serve as an illustration of key arguments from the wider literature on if and why public library buildings matter at a micro/local level.

3.2 Other research methods exploring library as place

The LIS literature also provides examples of other research methods used to explore public library spaces including a growing trend towards ethnography and longitudinal studies which some scholars and practitioners argue are more effective in gauging users’ behaviour in and satisfaction with their library spaces (Cavanagh, 2013; Sequieros, 2011; Bilandzic & Foth, 2013; and Khoo et al, 2012 for an overview of ethnographic studies in libraries.) Cronin (2014) goes so far as to point out that an over-reliance on surveys alone which tend to only highlight users’ dissatisfaction with spaces and services and not to offer pragmatic solutions to their issues, should be replaced or combined with a more holistic mixed methodological approach which could be more meaningful. While Cronin’s focus is academic libraries, the methods proposed could easily be adopted for research into public libraries. Similarly, Hernon and Matthews (2013, p 187) advocate ethnographic studies to better understand patterns of information use in order to design better, more tailored library buildings and the spaces within.

3.3 Evaluation of prior public library case studies

The literature review in Section 2 illustrated that the start of the 21st century has seen numerous case studies focussed on newly built public libraries which has coincided with the aforementioned renewed interest in the library as built form from both within the scholarly community and the wider public and with the proliferation of exciting and innovative new libraries. While some are located outside the UK, a handful are referenced here as informative examples of case studies which helped shape this case study's structure, data collection instruments and research output.

Wills's (2003) case study of the Idea Stores in Tower Hamlets provides a clear narrative including background to the Idea Stores 'brand' and the rethinking of established library models, planning and design considerations, service goals and objectives, results and reflections. Notably, the study concludes by saying that qualitative data in the form of user testimonies are the best way to gauge the success of new projects such as this which change preconceived ideas about what a library should look like and the role it should fulfil.

Fisher et al's (2007) study of Seattle Public Library is a clear and well-structured example of case study methodology and includes its user questionnaire as an appendix for future research projects of this kind and Bryson et al's (2003) case studies of Peckham and Norwich libraries outline excellent research aims and objectives as well as gathering multiple sources of data which present a holistic viewpoint.

3.4 Choice of case study subject

CWL was selected as the single case study for this research because it is a high-profile, purpose-built modern library serving a large and diverse urban community in London. It is architecturally interesting and was the subject of a field visit as part of the author's post-graduate course module on Information Management and Policy which sparked an interest in it. It was easily accessible for the author and access was granted at an early stage from a member of senior library staff at Southwark Council. A background exploration of the case study library was carried out using the council's website, press articles and information gathered on two visits, during which notes were taken on its location, exterior design and interior layout, fixtures and fittings and library use was observed. These observations would directly inform the questionnaire design. The library's own literature in the form of a brochure, flyers and signage promoting events and activities were also crucial in writing the questionnaire and the case study narrative below.

3.5 Questionnaire design and data collection

The questionnaire was devised after a critical analysis of the literature, including the research methods literature (Pickard, 2013; Oppenheim, 2005; Gorman and Clayton, 2005) and previous questionnaires (Fisher et al, 2007; Beard & Bawden, 2011; Leckie & Hopkins, 2002.) Also crucial in designing the questionnaire were the responses to the MOA directive on Public Library Buildings (MOA, 2005) which yielded key terms, phrases and vocabulary. For example, a number of respondents to the MOA directive referred to modern libraries as "light and airy." This was incorporated into the questionnaire and listed as an option for respondents to choose from to describe the interior of the library in this study. Terms like "civic landmark," "social or community hub," and "public space for learning" were also commonly found in the LIS literature and beyond on perceptions of public libraries and were employed here to discover if any of these terms resonated with library users at the case study library.

Concepts such as civic pride and the role of libraries in the regeneration of local areas were also drawn from the literature (Fisher et al 2007; McLaren, 2013) and the importance of features such as accessibility and sustainable, eco-design are discussed at length in the library design and architecture literature (Edwards, 2011; Smith and Flannery, 2014.) However, care was taken to ensure that respondents were given the opportunity to comment on and describe in their own words aspects or features of the library design or space which were important to them with an open-ended component to relevant questions.

A pilot questionnaire was handed out in early September 2014 after it was sent via email to senior library staff at CWL for their input and approval. This provided useful insight into how much time would be needed to carry out the final survey (the desired sample was determined from the outset as 100 for a small-scale project of this kind) and also into the questionnaire content and structure. In one short afternoon session, a small sample of data (20 responses) was collected. Overall, the feedback was positive with respondents commenting that it was simple to complete and took the estimated 8-10 minutes to fill in. Two respondents said it was quite long but the majority of respondents took the time to add their free-text comments when given the opportunity to do so in the open-ended questions. The analysis of responses was also quite straightforward using simple descriptive statistics and the process was helpful in determining the time needed to analyse the final sample.

Amendments were made to the questionnaire to reflect the comments of respondents in the pilot study and to add clarification where needed to the wording of certain questions. Dates were agreed with the guidance and permission of senior library staff who helped to identify times when footfall would be high, namely weekday afternoons/evenings and weekends but which would reflect typical library use (ie not during school holidays.) Three separate visits were scheduled during October 2014 – one weekday afternoon/evening from 2.30pm – 6pm and two Saturday afternoons from 1.30pm – 5pm. A total of 115 questionnaires were handed out, of which 102 were returned and completed, 11 were unreturned and 2 were returned incomplete (more than half of questions unanswered and considered unusable).

Questionnaires were handed out to library users in all areas of the library to people using the computer terminals, browsing in the different book sections or borrowing or returning books at the self-check kiosks. This kind of purposive sampling was used to ensure that as many different perspectives from as diverse a sample as possible could be collected, particularly on library use and user satisfaction though an equal gender split was sought to provide a representative population sample. I approached people discreetly and without bias, taking care not to target a particular demographic or sample. The questionnaire was also carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines set out in the proposal (Appendix 1.)

Only a small number of people declined to fill in a questionnaire when I approached them, citing lack of time as their reason not to do so, but the response rate overall was very high with many people wanting to fill in the questionnaire with me and discuss their answers. This aligns with Pickard's (2013, p 223) assessment of researcher-administered questionnaires as opposed to email or postal questionnaires where responses rates can be poor. There was also a notable high level of interest in the purpose of the research and many respondents took time to share their library experiences and opinions of their library with me in person when I collected it from them.

The questionnaire was divided into three main sections – Location, Design and Use of Space and included 32 open and closed questions (Appendix 3) and concluded with three demographic questions (Pickard, 2013, p 210) to establish the age, gender and occupation of the sample.

3.6 Case study research setting – Canada Water Library (CWL)

CWL was dubbed “London’s first superlibrary” when it opened in November 2011 and serves a large, diverse urban community in the London docklands areas of Rotherhithe and Surrey Quays ([Southwark Council](#), 2011.) Integrated into the Canada Water tube and overground station below and adjacent to the bus station, the library overlooks the Canada Water basin and is part of a new town square, beyond which are several recently-built residential apartment and office blocks, retail and warehouse units including the headquarters of the Daily Mail group and the sprawling Surrey Quays shopping centre. CWL is “at the heart of a key docklands regeneration area which is otherwise rather piecemeal in its assembly of housing, warehouses, retail sheds and other services” (Worpole, 2013, p 114.) However, Worpole’s assessment of the area’s “ordinaryness” may be misplaced as CWL is flanked by two other architecturally notable buildings – Eva Jiricná’s ultra-modern bus station and the railway station designed by Buro Happold. The regeneration of the area and the extent to which CWL’s role in “community revitalisation” is a success for its stakeholders is evaluated in McLaren’s ‘A new heart’ (2013.)

Libraries matter in Southwark and CWL is one of the council’s “flagship” libraries alongside the award-winning Peckham Library and the soon-to-open Camberwell Library ([Southwark Council](#), 2014.) At a cost of £14.1 million and at 2,900 m², CWL represents a compelling physical expression of the council’s continued investment in their public library buildings and services, in spite of well-publicised cuts in central government funding for local councils and widespread library closures in neighbouring London boroughs ([CIPFA](#), 2014.) It is hoped that this case study research might benefit council and library staff by demonstrating the real value attributed to CWL by its users as well as helping inform future library projects.

Designed by leading architect firm CZWG, CWL has won several design awards including the 2013 Civic Trust Award and the 2013 Selwyn Goldsmith Award for Universal Design recognising a “building which is a welcoming community hub, clearly enjoyed and well used by all, which has excellent functionality, is inclusive and has exemplary accessible features.” It has also received a BREEAM sustainability rating of ‘very good’ and has outstanding green credentials including solar water heating, ground source heat pumps and a sedum roof whose space can be used for events (Southwark Council, 2014, p 2.)

The library’s exterior is described by Worpole (2013, p 114) as “an arresting shape which gives the appearance of an inverted pyramid or ziggurat, or even an ark out of water, which is highly suitable for a dock-side location.” CZWG, who had no prior experience in library design, were given a brief to design a building whose footprint on the ground was limited but which would have to accommodate the space necessary for the library on the upper levels – hence the inverted pyramid. They argue that “the idea of a free standing object in space is quite appropriate for a library, since it is a portal to the discovery of other worlds” and believe that they have created “a new place and resource to explore, read, learn, meet and be creative in.” (CZWG, 2011.)



Photograph: Alison Martino

Its main entrance at street level is welcoming and open and leads to a reception/enquiry area, café and the Culture Space. It is fully wheelchair accessible with lifts to the 1st and 2nd floors. The entrance area displays new books and bestsellers. It also has several bookable computer terminals for browsing the library catalogue and the internet next to the large windows, a photocopier and automated self-check lending machines for the easy borrowing and returning of books. The ground-floor open area also hosts a series of library-run activities like a weekly chess club and a drumming workshop which took place during one weekend visit.

There are screens which provide visitors with information about library events such as book groups as well as well-positioned council and community information boards offering advice on housing, jobs, children's activities, language learning and more. The Water's Edge café takes up half of the ground floor and has ample open seating next to large floor-to-ceiling windows which offer a view of the Canada Water dock. It should be noted that the café was closed during the time the survey was conducted which some respondents made reference to in their answers discussed in the Results which follow. The side entrance/exit leads directly from the library to the tube and overground station concourse below. The Culture Space is a performance space and theatre also situated on the ground floor next to the main reception area which seats approximately 150 people and which holds a wide range of events including performing and creative arts for children, author and reading events, comedy performances and new plays.



Photograph: [quiznovus/Flickr Commons](#)

The first floor is home to the main adult library and a large CD, DVD and games collection. The children's library and seating area is also located on this floor to the left of the central staircase. As well as shelves for a wide-range of children's books which are clearly divided into easy to browse sections from picture books to junior fiction to themed non-fiction, this area contains a Pirate Ship zone for reading to and with younger children, a seating space which hosts children's events and activities and a bank of computers just for children to use. It is a well-used and brightly coloured area which accommodates children of all ages.



Photograph: [quiznovus, Flickr Commons](#)

There is also a teenage library adjacent to the main adult library as well as a wide range of current newspapers and magazines to read. The first floor has floor-to-ceiling windows on one side which offer spectacular views of Canada Water, Harmsworth and Surrey Quays and beyond. There are more computer terminals as well as printers and more automated self-check machines. There is also a TV screen which broadcasts the BBC News channel with no sound. There is a combination of comfortable sofa seating overlooking the freshwater lake and desks and chairs on this floor.

The second floor gallery is also accessible by lifts and a smaller staircase and has a quiet study area with desks which overlook the main library space below. The second floor is also home to the Reference, History, Art and Craft, Business and Computing, Foreign Language, Science and Nature and Social Sciences collections which are shelved on the outer wall of the library using easy to browse, bookshop-style categories. The walls here are decorated with information panels and images depicting the industrial and social history of the Surrey Quays and Rotherhithe area.

There are six meeting and learning rooms on the second floor which are bookable in advance. The meeting rooms offer facilities for a variety of community groups and activities such as Adult and Children's Creative Writing, Mandarin for Toddlers, Origami and an NHS Health Hub.

Observation sessions revealed that CWL is a bustling library which has a wide range of users including students, parents with young children and older people. Staff are friendly, helpful and engaged with library users. It appears new even though it is three years old and the book stock is in very good condition. It has welcomed over 1 million visitors and issued over 1 million loans since its opening in November 2011 and features in CIPFA's list of the top 20 busiest libraries in the UK for number of issues for the third year in succession, up to 13th, in 2013-14 from 16th in 2012-13 ([CIPFA](#), 2014b.) It was also London's second busiest library for number of issues in 2013-14 ([CIPFA](#), 2014a.) Rotherhithe Library (built in 1975) on Albion Street served the local residents and community until 2011. It closed permanently in October that year pending opening of the new CWL. The smaller Blue Anchor library in Bermondsey is also nearby.

4. Results and discussion

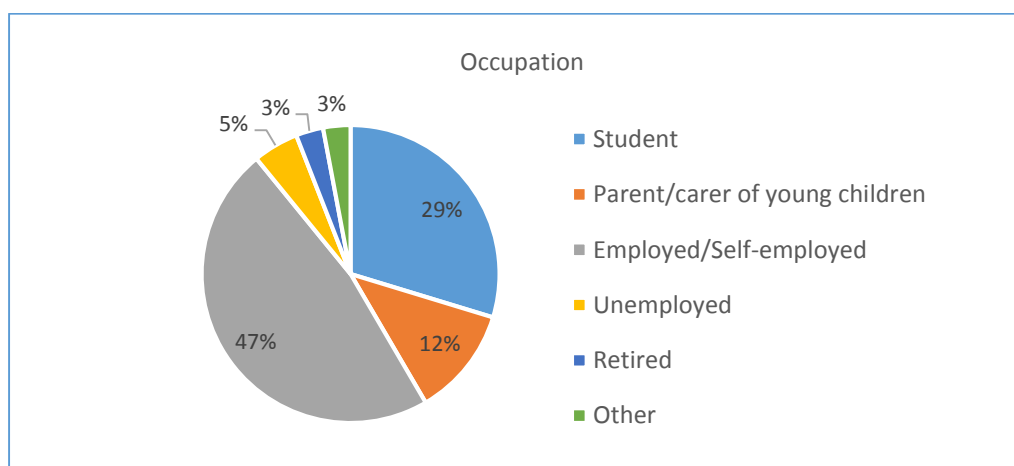
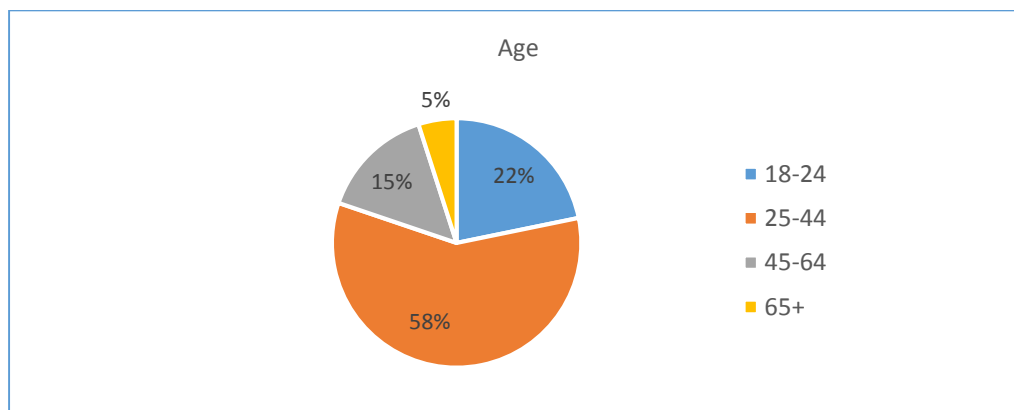
This section presents the findings of the questionnaire which asked respondents to specifically think about CWL and give their opinions on its location, design features and its use of space. Staff were also invited to fill in the questionnaire and their responses (10 in total) are included. Staff responses were only interpreted separately where their responses were markedly different or significant. Their responses to questions were also highlighted where their opinions as staff were important and noteworthy. Similarly, specific information on each demographic sample is only discussed if the responses showed a particular departure from the overall results.

4.1 Who took part?

CWL users were asked for information about themselves to provide basic demographic data on the sample based on gender, age and occupation. 48% of respondents were male and 51% female, 1% declined to answer. As discussed previously, this provided a more representative split than the MOA data in Black's (2011) study which means it could be reasonably applied to the wider population.

The age of respondents varied to give a good representation of the four age groups with the largest group (58%) being the 25-44 age group. The smallest group represented was the over 65s.

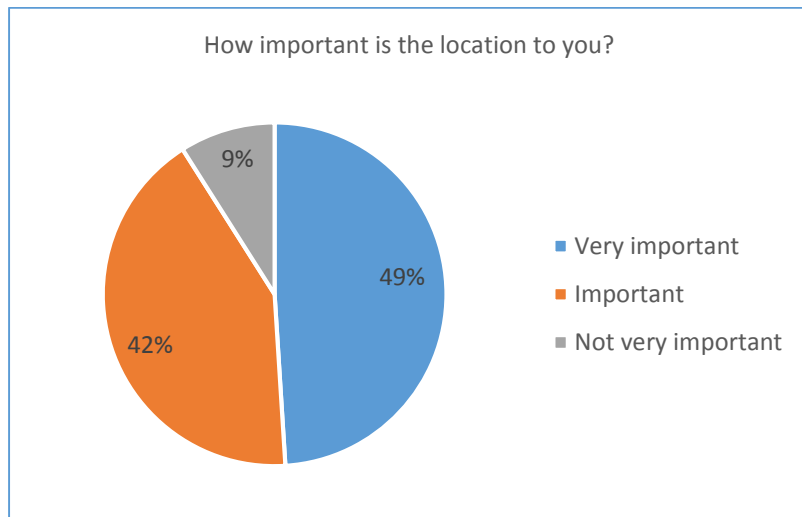
The respondents in this study also represented a variety of occupations – students made up 29% of the sample, 47% were employed or self-employed, 12% were parents or carers of young children, 5% were unemployed and 3% retired. 3% answered 'Other' and included a volunteer in the community, a person recently moved to the UK and looking for work and a person on a career break for one year.



4.2 Location

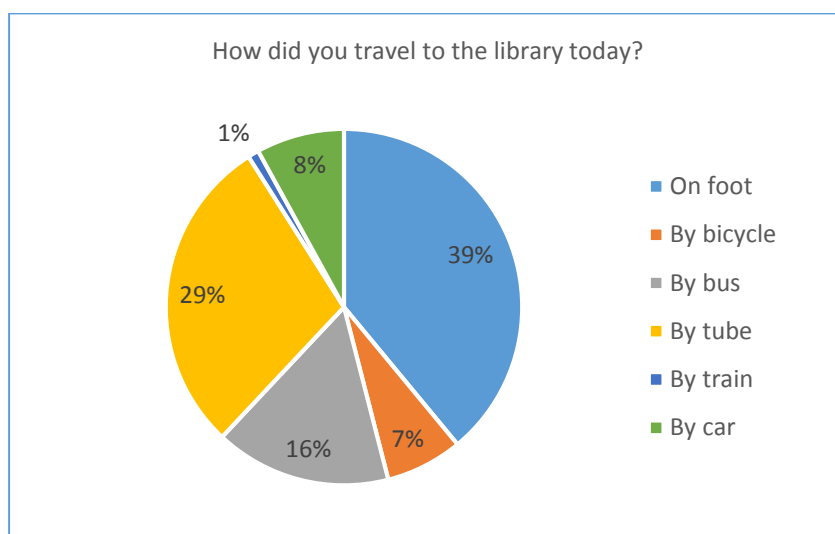
Q1. How important is the location of the library to you?

91% said that the location of the library is either very important or important (49% very important, 42% important) to them. 9% said it is not very important. No-one responded that it is not important at all. This suggests that library users regard location as an important factor in deciding whether or not to use their library. Respondents' answers to subsequent questions in this section explain why.



Q2. How did you travel to the library today?

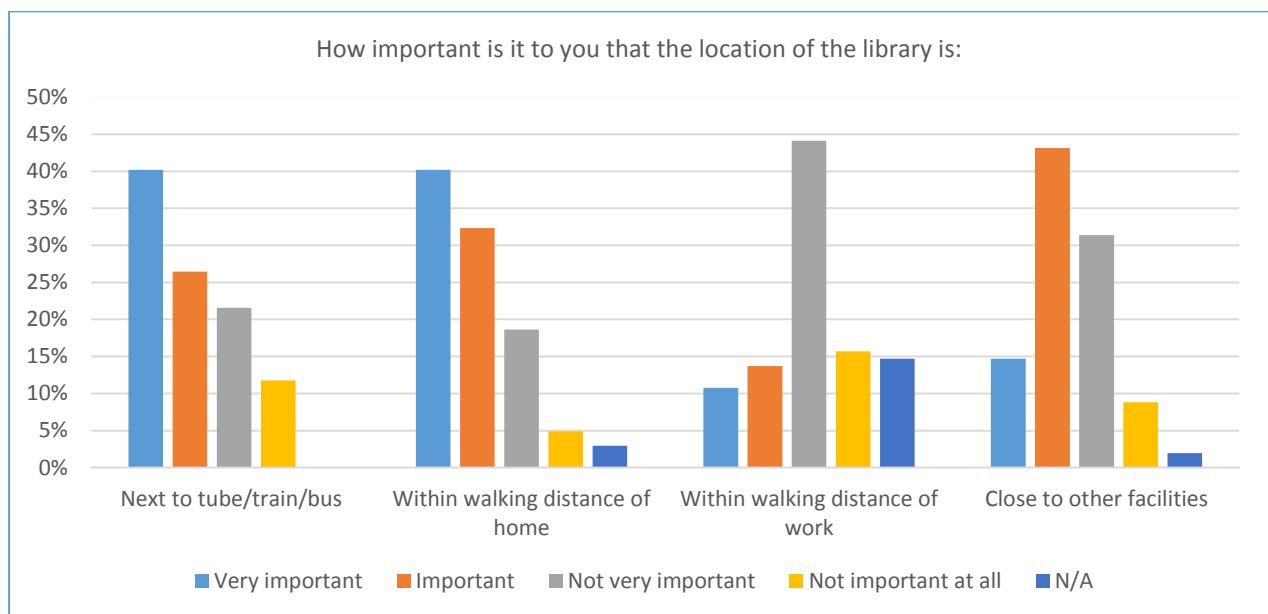
This question aimed to find out whether CWL is conveniently situated for its users. 39% walk to their library suggesting that it is in a convenient location for people who live or work locally. 7% of users cycle to the library. Interestingly, 46% use public transport of some kind, an indication that the library's proximity to good transport links is a notable advantage to its users who perhaps visit the library from further afield.



Q3. Thinking about the location of the library, how important is it to you that it is:

Next to the tube/train/bus station, Within walking distance of your home, Within walking distance of your workplace, Close to other facilities (e.g. health centre, leisure centre, shops, cafes and restaurants.)

72% responded that it was either very important or important that the library is located within walking distance of their home. 66% said that the fact that the library is situated next to the tube/bus and train station was either very important or important to them. 58% said that it was either very important or important that the library is located close to other amenities like shops, cafés/restaurants, leisure or health centres though nearly a third (31%) also responded that this aspect was not very important to them. 44% said that it was not very important that that library is located within walking distance of their workplace. This could signify that they work further afield and live locally and only visit the library from home.



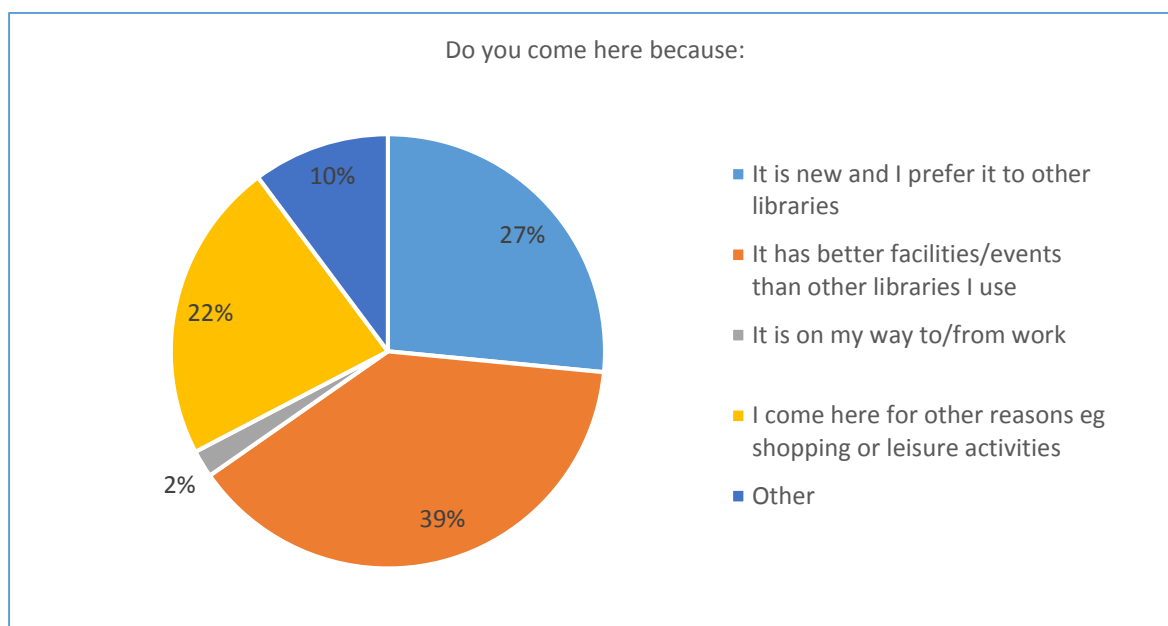
The following four questions explored if and why people come to CWL in particular when other libraries may be closer.

Q4. Is this your nearest local library?

In answer to this question, 50% said yes this is their nearest local library and 49% said no. This split suggests that CWL is succeeding in attracting both people from the immediate local area and people from further away. This includes people who are coming to CWL because they have read or heard about it (so-called “library tourists”) with one respondent saying that she is a consultant librarian who travels throughout Europe visiting new libraries and was visiting CWL after reading about it.

Q5. If the answer to Q4 is No, do you come here because...

This question probes a little deeper to discover why people choose to use this library over libraries which may be closer to them and looks at factors other than location which may influence them. Of the 49% who said this is not their nearest local library, the largest percentage (39%) said it is because CWL has better facilities or events than other libraries closer to them, 27% said they prefer it to other libraries because it is new and 22% said they use this library because they come to the area for other reasons like shopping at the Surrey Quays shopping centre or using a nearby leisure centre. 10% cited other reasons including library tourism as mentioned above, the library’s convenient location between home and gym and visiting the library for a special event.

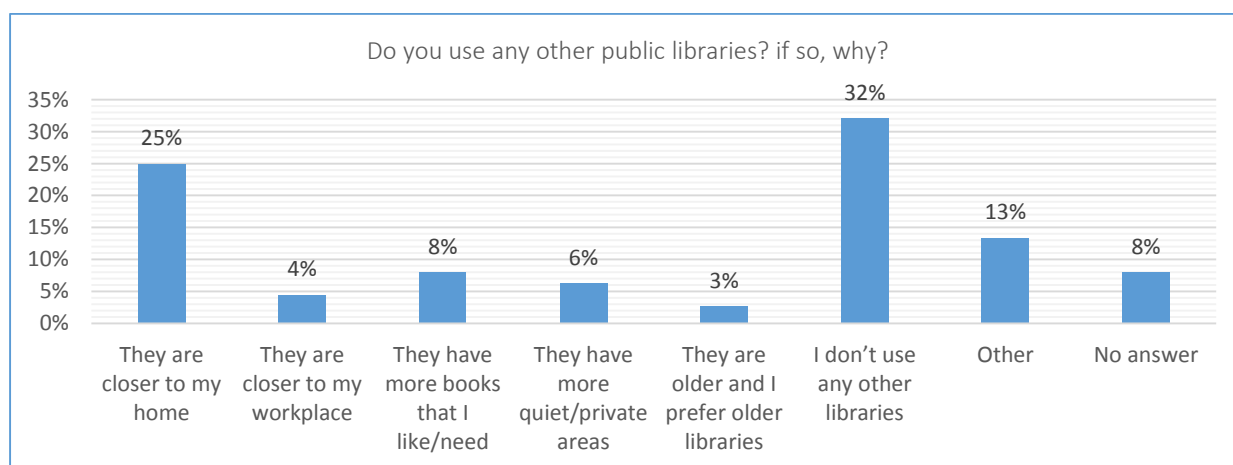


Q6. Are you more likely to visit a new library like this one than an older, more traditional library?

60% said they were more likely to visit a new library like this one than an older, more traditional library. 16% said they were less likely and 23% replied N/A indicating no preference or that they were neither more nor less likely to visit a new library like CWL than an older, more traditional library.

Q7. Do you use any other public libraries? If so, why?

32% of respondents do not use any other libraries. Of those who said they do, 25% said they use other libraries because they are closer to their home, 8% said they have more books they need or want, 6% said they use other libraries because they have more quiet/private areas and 4% said they use other libraries because they are closer to their workplace. 3% said they use other libraries because they are older and they prefer older libraries and 13% cited other reasons including “When I’m in another area, I’ll pop in to have a look”, “I like to use different spaces”, “to explore other libraries” and some respondents referenced specific libraries like “Lewisham, for variety and because it’s close to the shops.”

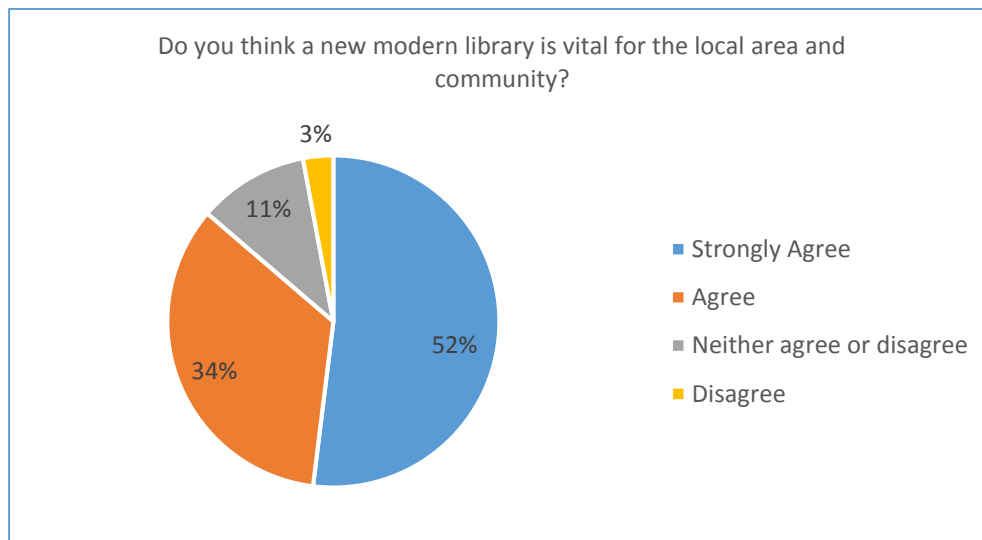


Q8. The library is part of a wider regeneration of the whole Rotherhithe/Canada Quays area. To what extent do you agree that it has an important role in this regeneration?

95% of people said they either strongly agreed (45%) or agreed (50%) that CWL has an important role to play in the regeneration of the local area. No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement which suggests CWL's users perceive its contribution to the area very positively.

Q9. Do you think having a new modern library here is vital for the local area and community?

A similarly high proportion of respondents (86%) either strongly agreed (52%) or agreed (34%) that Canada Water Library is vital for the local area and community. 3% disagreed with the statement and 11% neither agreed nor disagreed. Not surprisingly, all 10 staff members surveyed think the library has a vital role to play in the local community.



Q10. Are you proud of this library and how it looks?

91% of respondents said they are proud of the library and how it looks. 3% said they were not proud of the library and 5% answered N/A, interpreted here to mean that they have no strong feelings on this point.

The idea of civic pride which is widely discussed in the literature on public library buildings and which many respondents in Black's MOA data referred to when writing about older, Carnegie-era library buildings. Evidence here suggests that it might also be a term applied to modern library buildings like CWL.

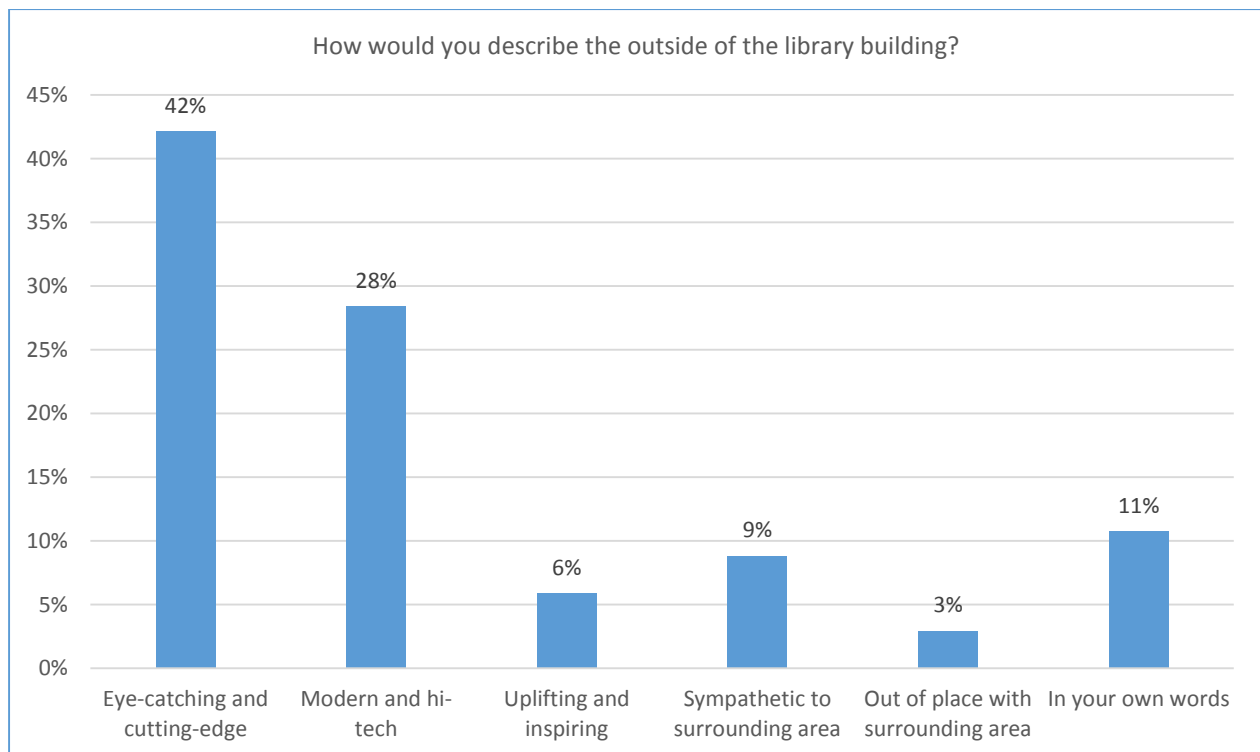
At the end of this section, respondents were provided with a space to add any further comments about the location of the library. 38% took the opportunity to do so and these free-text responses are included in Appendix 4 and discussed in Section 4.5 below.

4.3 Design

Q11. How would you describe the outside of the library building?

Respondents were asked to choose one option. Descriptive terms for this question were chosen from responses to the MOA directive and the wider literature which described newly-built libraries like Peckham, Norwich, Brighton and others to determine if CWL is perceived in a similar way by its users.

42% described the library's exterior as eye-catching and cutting-edge, 28% as modern and hi-tech, 6% as uplifting and inspiring, 9% described it as sympathetic to the surrounding area. 3% said that they thought the library looks out of place with the surrounding area. 11% chose to describe the library in their own words. These responses are discussed in Section 4.6.



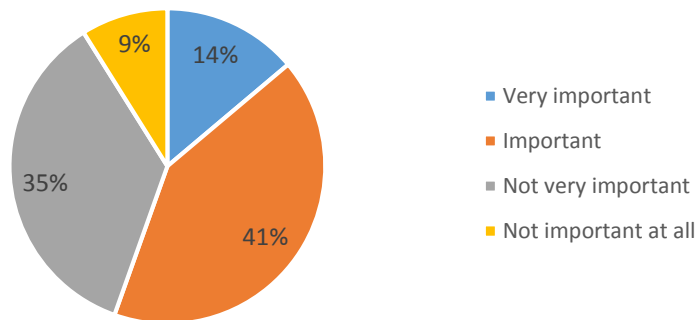
Qs 12 and 13 aimed to explore further a theme which MOA respondents were asked to comment on – the importance or need for a library to fit in on a high street, in a city centre or with other buildings around it and how modern libraries often stand out, provoking conflicting opinions from the public.

Q12. Do you think the library fits in well with the other buildings around it?

Q13. Is it important that the library fits in with its immediate surroundings?

87% thought that CWL fits in well with the other buildings around it. 12% disagreed. When asked if it was important that the library fits in well with its immediate surroundings, 14% said that it was very important and 41% said it was important that it did. However, over a third (35%) said it is not very important and 9% said that it is not important at all.

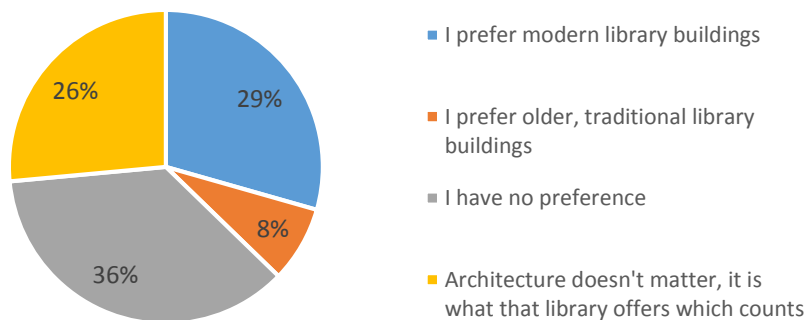
Is it important that the library fits in with its immediate surroundings?



Q14. Which of these best describes your attitude to public library buildings?

In response to this question, which sought a contemporary snapshot of attitudes to public library buildings in general, users of CWL are divided. 29% said they preferred modern library buildings, only 8% said they preferred older-style, more traditional library buildings, 36% said they had no preference for old or modern library buildings and 26% said that style of architecture is irrelevant, it is what the library offers which is important. While a direct comparison cannot be made of the data, it is possible to observe that users of CWL are as divided in their preferences for modern or traditional-style library buildings as the respondents in the MOA study.

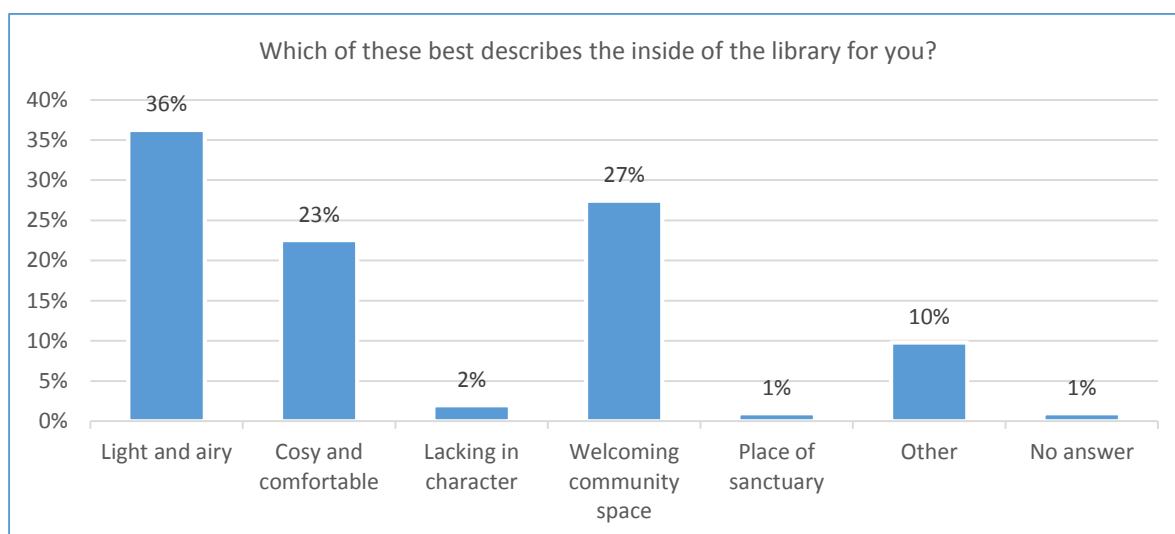
Which of these best describes your attitude to public library buildings?



15. Which of these best describes the inside of the library for you?

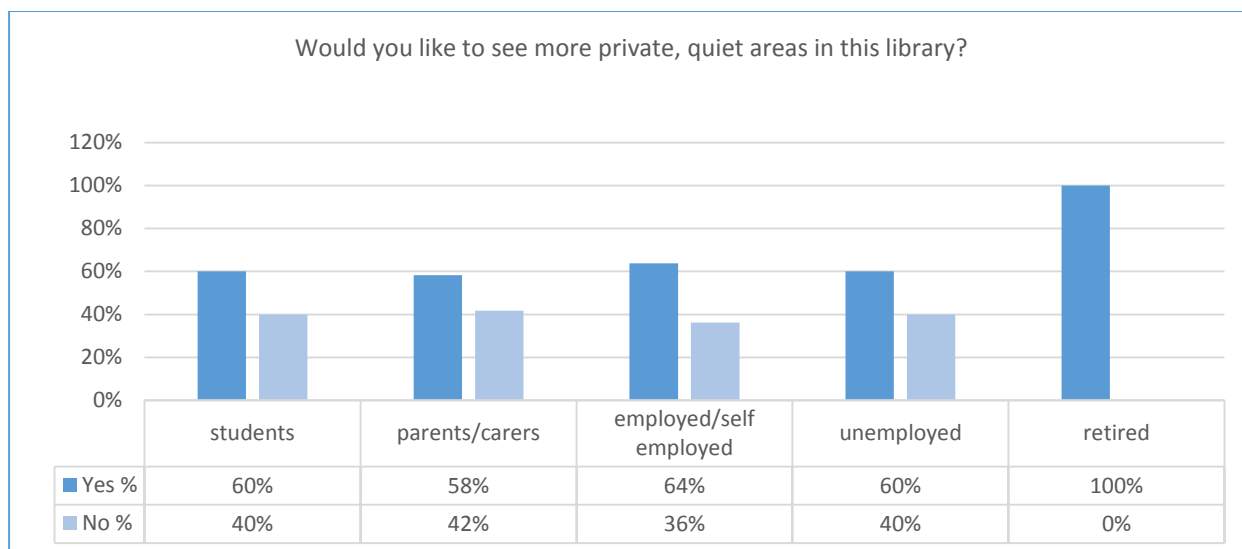
Again, respondents were asked to choose from a range of descriptive terms which were drawn from Black's (2011) study and the wider literature to describe modern library interior spaces. They were also given the option to describe the library's interior design in their own words.

36% described the inside of the library as light and airy, 27% described it as a welcoming community space, 23% described the library as cosy and comfortable and 1% as a place of sanctuary. On the more negative side, 2% said the library's interior lacks character and of those who chose to describe the inside of the library in their own words (10%), one respondent described it as *"too open"* and another as *"busy, muddled, confused."* The remaining responses are discussed in Section 4.6.



Q16. Would you like to see more private, quiet areas in this library?

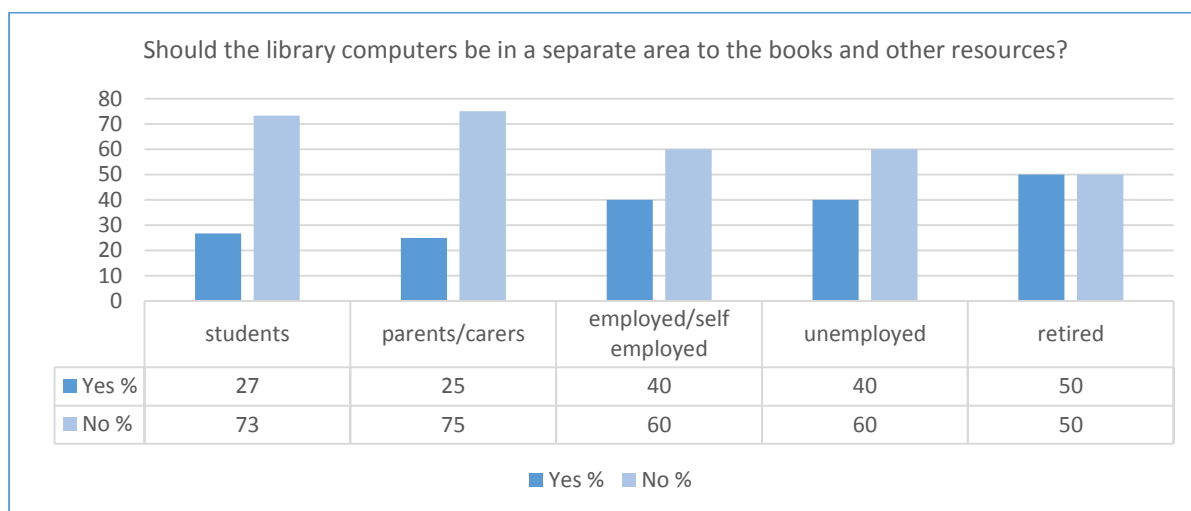
61% responded yes they would. 36% said no they would not. This provides evidence of the desire for quiet reading or study areas which reinforces the perceived importance of these areas in public libraries to their users. Staff responses also reflect this. Analysis of the responses by specific user groups reveals that retired users are unanimous in their demand for more quiet spaces but the majority of responses do not indicate that users of a particular age or occupation demand this more or less than any other. However, respondents in the 45-64 age group were divided and are the only demographic group which in fact showed a slightly higher percentage of 'no' responses (53% against 47% which said yes, they would like to see more quiet areas.)



Q17. Should the library computers be in a separate area to the books and other resources?

31% believed that the computers should be in a separate area. 65% said they should not be separate. Figures show that students (73%) and parent/carers of young children (75%) are the two groups which feel most strongly about this.

Black (2011, p 41) uses Brighton's Jubilee library as an example of a newly-built library which has chosen to separate off its computer terminals in a single room, segregated from the main library space. Responses from users of CWL suggest that this would not be a welcome design choice in future library projects.

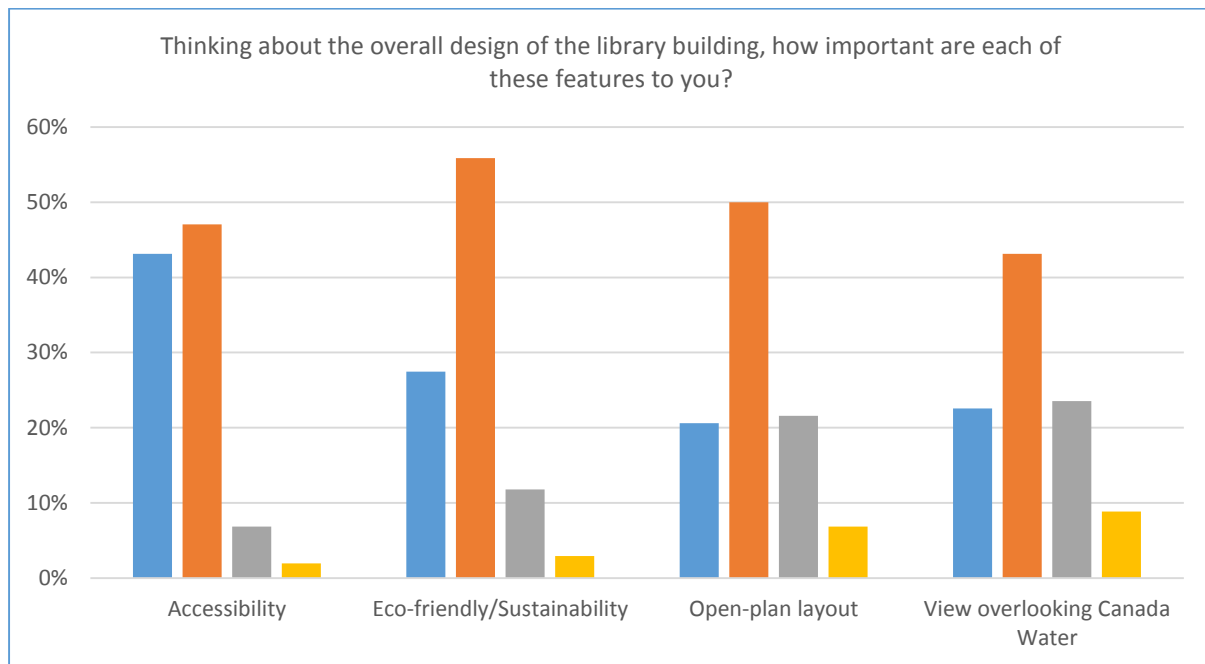


Q18. Thinking about the overall design of the library building, how important are each of these features to you?

Respondents were asked to rate certain features of the library from very important to not important at all. For example, much is made of sustainable eco-design, for example, in the recent LIS and library design literature (Worpole, 2013; Smith and Flannery, 2014) and CWL has won praise for its

commitment to sustainability and green credentials but do its users regard this as an important feature of this library? And if so, how important is it to them?

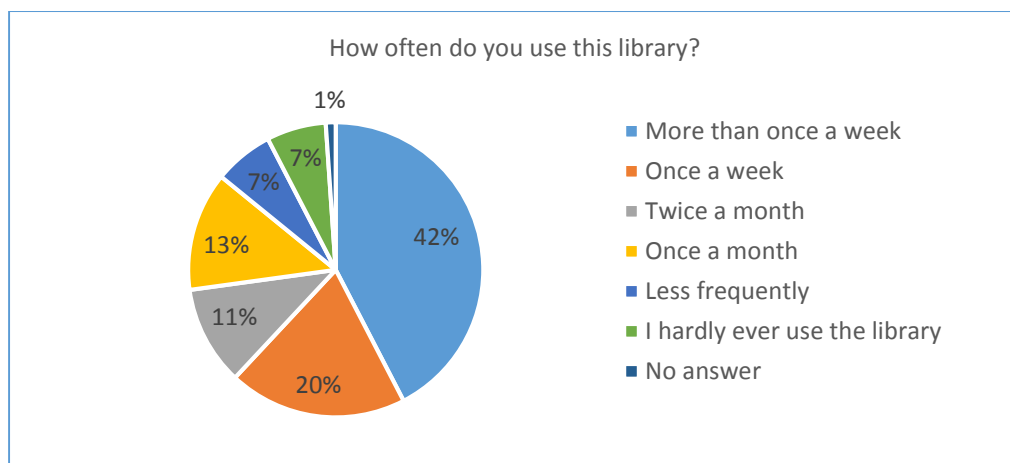
90% of respondents said that accessibility was either very important (43%) or important (47%) to them; Over half of respondents said that sustainability was important to them (56%) and 27% said it was very important to them; 71% responded that the open-plan layout was either very important (21%) or important (50%) to them and 66% said that the view overlooking the Canada Water basin was either very important (23%) or important (43%). Among those who highlighted additional features which were important to them (5%), respondents chose features like *“a sense of space, a long view makes it more pleasant”*, *“a view is important to me”* and *“lighting is very important.”*



4.4 Use of space

Q19. How often do you use this library?

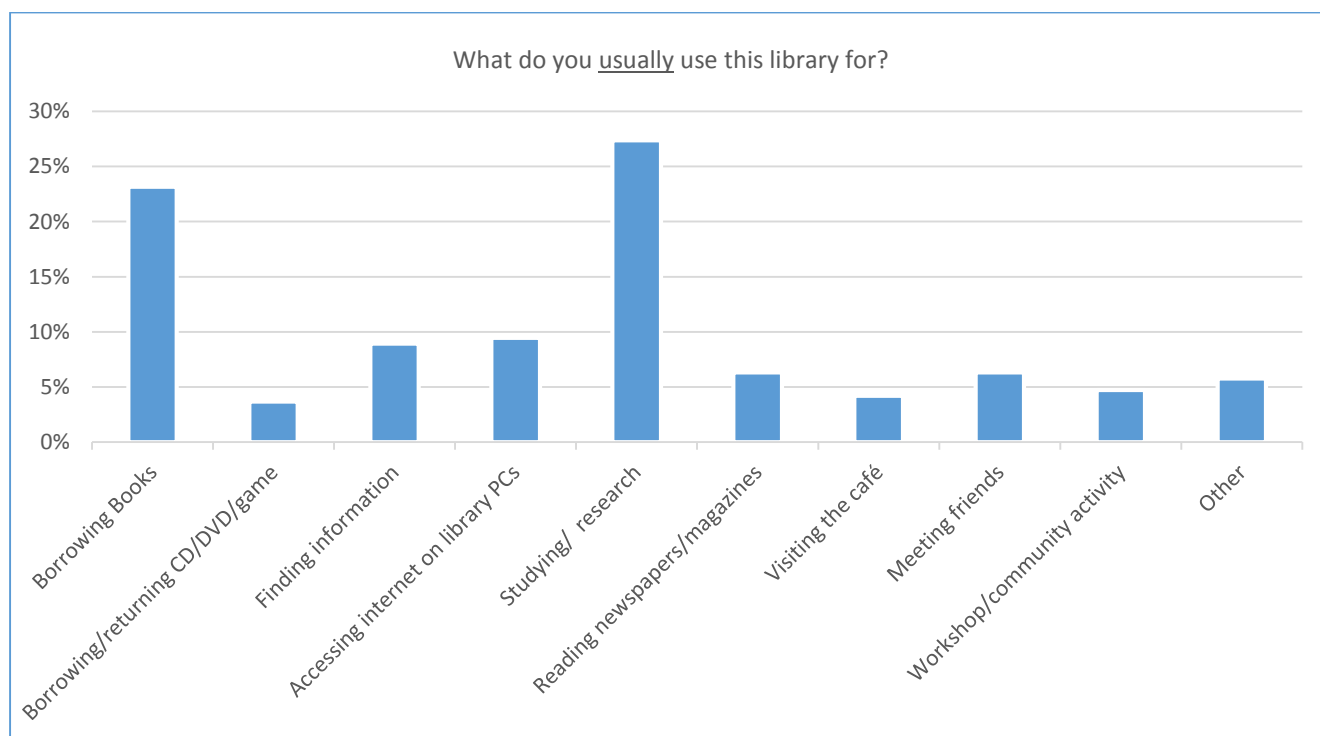
62% of respondents said they use the library at least once a week, with 42% of respondents using the library more than once a week and 20% once a week. 11% of respondents said they use it twice a month. 13% of respondents said that they use the library once a month. 7% of respondents use it less frequently and 7% responded that they hardly ever use the library. As CIPFA's (2014a and b) recent figures revealed, CWL is a busy library when compared to other libraries in London and beyond, and these responses provide more detailed evidence that nearly two-thirds of its users are those who are frequent users who use the library on a regular basis.



Q20. What do you usually use this library for?

Respondents could choose multiple options from a choice of ten. These included core library functions such as borrowing or returning books and other resources like CDs or DVDs, using the library computers, finding information, study or research but also included some of the socio-cultural and community functions that the library helps to facilitate such as attending workshops or events, visiting the café and meeting friends.

Those who responded 'Other' in addition to choosing several options from the list (6%) added the following reasons – “work related usage,” “Canada Water Church meeting,” “bringing my toddler in to read and play,” “browsing, relaxing,” “meeting with clients,” “as base for job hunting,” “self-study.”

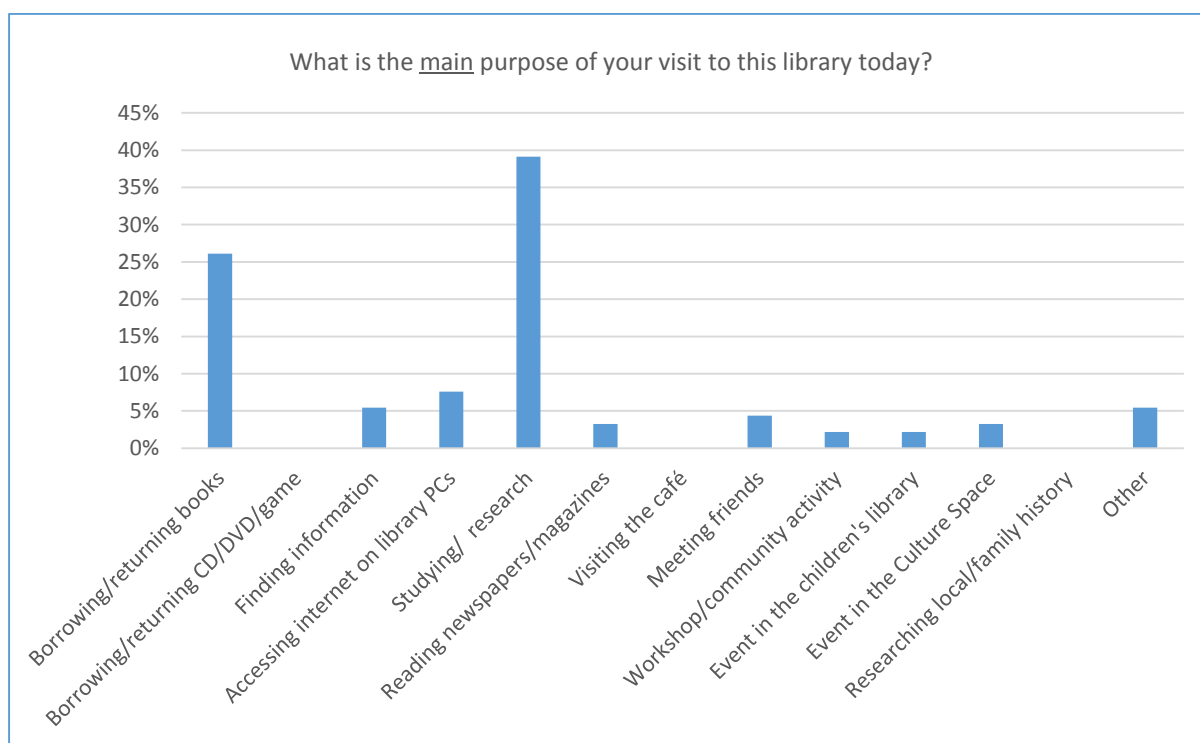


Q21. What is the main purpose of your visit to this library today?

This question asked respondents to specify what they had come to the library for on the particular day they completed the questionnaire and asked them to choose one option from a choice of thirteen. The choice was widened here to give a wider range of possible answers and allow respondents to answer as accurately and as specifically as possible.

39% of respondents said they came to use the library to study or carry out research, 25% came to borrow or return books, 8% were using the library computers, 5% came to the library to find information and 3% to read newspapers or magazines. 11% of respondents said that they had come to the library for one of the social and community activities listed, of which 3% came for an event in the Culture Space. 4% were meeting friends, 2% were attending an event in the children's library and 2% a workshop/community activity. It should be noted here that the café was closed during the sessions the survey was carried out, due to a changeover of lease and a new catering provider yet to be in place. Some respondents made comments in the free-text sections or raised this point with the author or in their responses to Q22, wanting to know why the café was closed and when it was going to reopen.

The 5% 'Other' purposes respondents gave were *"having some time out of our small apartment on a rainy Saturday," "sitting in a quiet place to write," "work," "killing time," "visiting only."*



Q22. How important are each of these spaces in the library to you?

The aim of this question was to gain insight into the most valued physical spaces in the library and to build up a picture of who is using them and for what purpose. The question includes all the main areas within the library building as described in Section 3.6. An additional option allowed respondents to say they do not use a particular area. This was added after results of the pilot questionnaire revealed that many respondents answered this question by saying that all the areas are either very important or

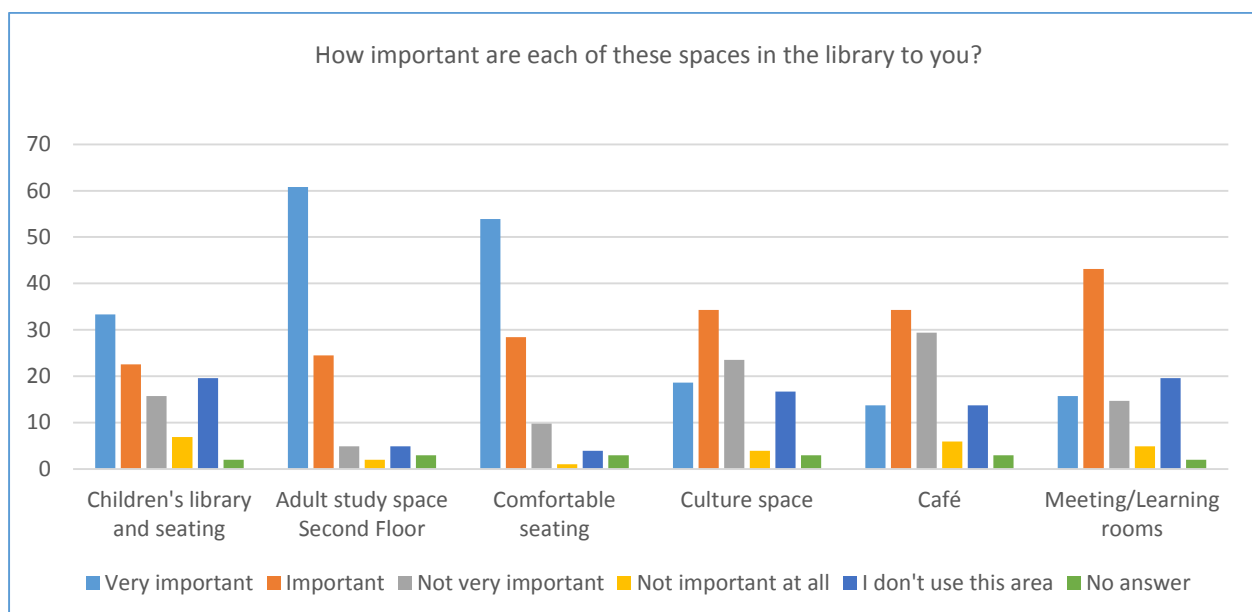
important to them. This would hopefully eliminate the blanket positive responses and lead to more meaningful results.

The adult study space is valued most highly by the largest number of respondents – 86% saying that they regard it as either very important (61%) or important (25%) to them. The comfortable seating areas (located on the first floor) were also rated highly by a large proportion of respondents (82%) – 54% and 28% saying they are either very important or important, respectively. The children’s area, though not used by 20% of respondents, is nonetheless regarded as a very important (33%) or important (23%) space to those who do use it (56%).

The community spaces - the meeting and learning rooms, Culture Space and downstairs café are also regarded as valued spaces within the library. 59% of respondents thought the meeting and learning rooms are either very important (16%) or important (43%), 53% thought the café is either very important or important, the Culture Space is either very important (19%) or important (34%) to 52%. Nearly a third of respondents said the café is not very important and 24% said the same of the Culture Space. 15% thought the meeting and learning rooms are not very important and 16% thought the children’s library is not very important.

By analysing the responses in greater detail, the majority of students (90%) regard the adult study space as very important to them although the other user groups by occupation also rate this space very highly (including 83% of parents/carers and 81% of employed/self-employed.) Not surprisingly the user group to value the children’s library most highly is the parents/carers of young children with 92% saying it is very important or important to them. The comfortable seating areas are rated highly across all the user groups by occupation with 90% and 100% of employed/self-employed and unemployed users respectively and 80% of students saying they are very important or important to them.

High percentages of unemployed users (80%) and parents and carers (70%) rate the meeting and learning rooms as either important or very important. This may reflect the activities which are available to users – from children’s craft workshops to job-seeking or community outreach/advice sessions on health, money, housing etc.



Q23. How important are each of these aspects of the library to you?

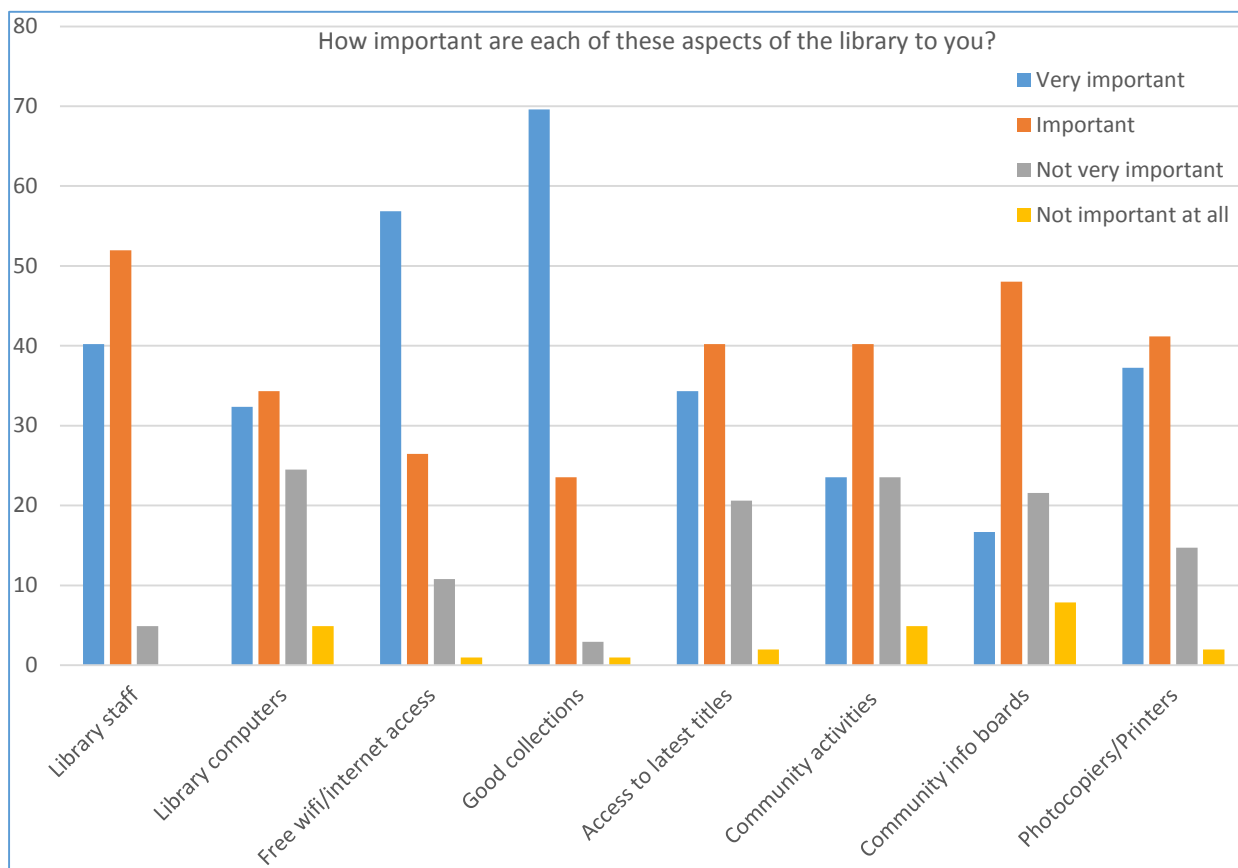
By asking library users to comment on particular aspects of their library like help from library staff or the IT facilities provided by the library, it is possible to gain insight into aspects which, in addition to what they think of the physical library space itself contribute to their attitude to what is important to them about their public library and the benefits they perceive from using it. This instantiates what Black (2011) describes as 'libraryness' and the value library users place on the collections, services and facilities which they find within their public libraries.

The most valued aspect of their library to the respondents here is a good collection of books and other resources with 94% saying that it is either very important (70%) or important (24%) to them. 3% responded that this is not very important and only 1% responded that it is not important at all. 92% of respondents thought that help from and availability of staff is either very important (40%) or important (52%) to them though a higher percentage of respondents regarded free wifi/internet access as very important (57%). Access to the latest titles was rated very important or important by 74% of respondents compared to 66% who thought library computers were either very important or important.

CWL hosts a wide range of community activities such as citizenship and job-seeking workshops, foreign language classes including learning English as a foreign language, children's and church activities. A significant number of CWL users placed a high value on both these activities and on the community information boards located in the library which provide details of other council-run services and events across the borough – 48% said the community information boards are important, 17% very important. 40% said the community workshops and activities are important and 24% very important. Interestingly, 24% and 22% also responded that the community activities and community information boards are not very important to them, respectively.

Of those who responded "not very important" to each aspect of the library listed, the highest percentage of respondents chose the library computers (25%). The most responses to the "not important at all" option were recorded against the community information boards (8%) with 4% also answering N/A to this option, signifying that this aspect of the library does not apply to them or they do not use them.

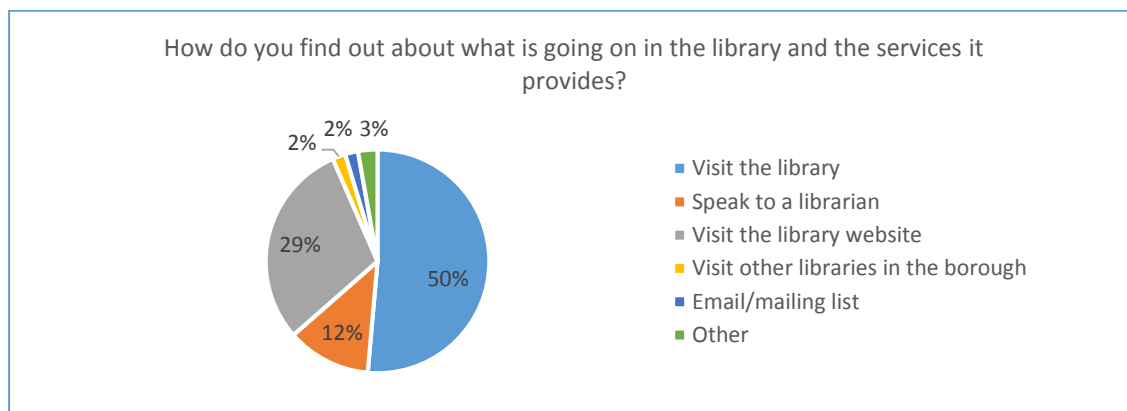
When the answers were analysed to look at the age and occupation of the respondents, the results showed that all user groups by occupation and regarded all aspects with the same proportional degree of importance.



Q24. How do you find out about what is going on in the library and the services it provides?

This purpose of this question was to ascertain how important coming to the library itself to find about library services and events is or are users more likely to engage with the library in other ways by going online, visiting the library website or via an email newsletter. The results provide evidence that CWL's physical presence still remains an important factor in informing its users on the services it provides.

Half of respondents find out about library services and events by coming to the library itself and a further 12% said they speak to a member of the library staff in person to find out what is going on in the library. 29% visit the library website and 2% go to other libraries in the borough. Of the 3% who cited other reasons, one respondent said she learn about events and activities "via my children's school" and the remaining respondents answered N/A.



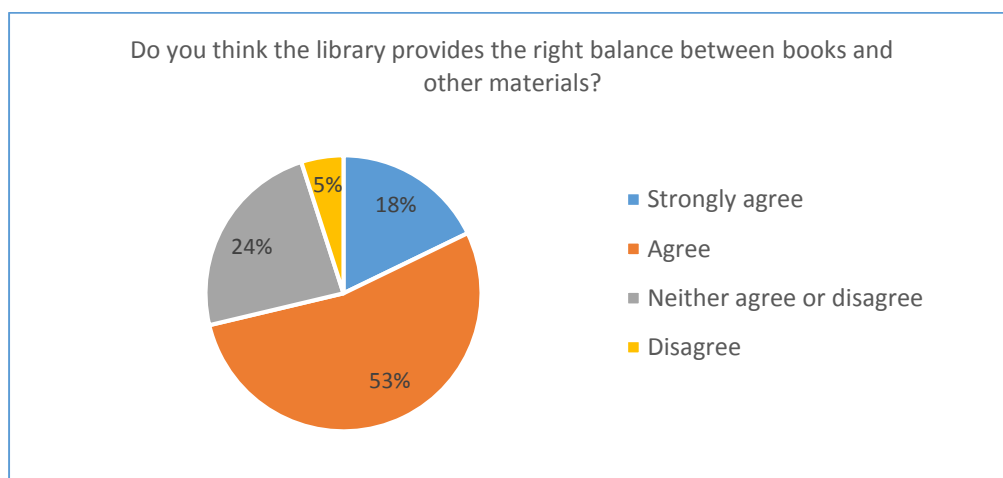
Q25. Do you think this library makes the best use of its space?

Respondents were asked to think about how the space is used at CWL and comment on whether or not the library makes the best use of the space it has. CWL's inverted pyramid design means it does not have a large footprint at ground level but this increases on the first and second floors to house the facilities and spaces described in Section 3.6 and summarised in Q22 of the questionnaire.

69% said they thought it did make the best use of its space, with 23% strongly agreeing and 46% agreeing. 18% neither agreed nor disagreed with the question, 10% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. Of those respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed, many provided reasons why they did not think the library makes the best use of its space in their responses to Q29 which asked users to suggest ways in which they would improve their library space. These free-text responses have been transcribed (see Appendix 5) and are discussed later in Section 4.8.

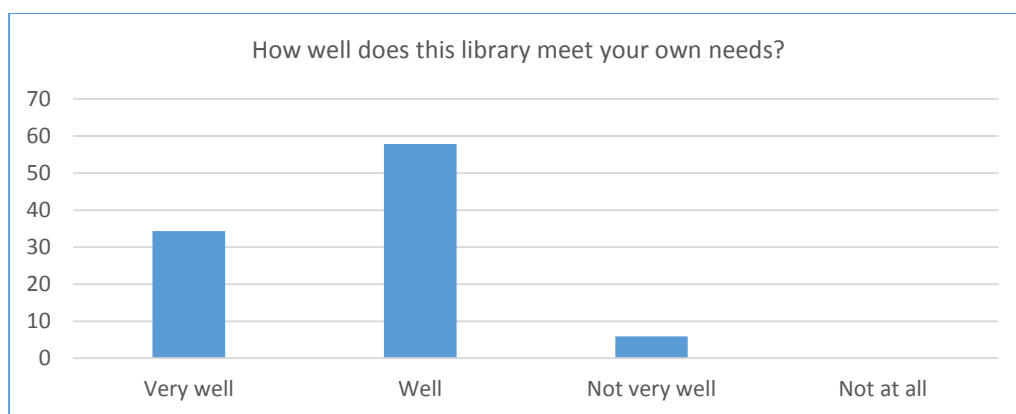
Q26. Do you think this library provides the right balance between books and other materials (CDs, DVDs, newspapers) on the one hand and computer facilities on the other?

71% either agreed or strongly agreed that the library does provide the right balance between resources such as books, CDs, newspapers and magazines and so on and IT. 24% neither or agreed nor disagreed and 5% disagreed. A number of respondents in Black's (2011) study commented on the growing trend in modern libraries for less books and more IT infrastructure and electronic resources, a trend which they lamented. Evidence from this survey would suggest that CWL has the balance right. A handful of respondents did comment that more books would be welcome in their responses to Q29, though it is not clear if they wanted more books instead of other resources or facilities or just more books.



Q27. How well does this library meet your own needs?

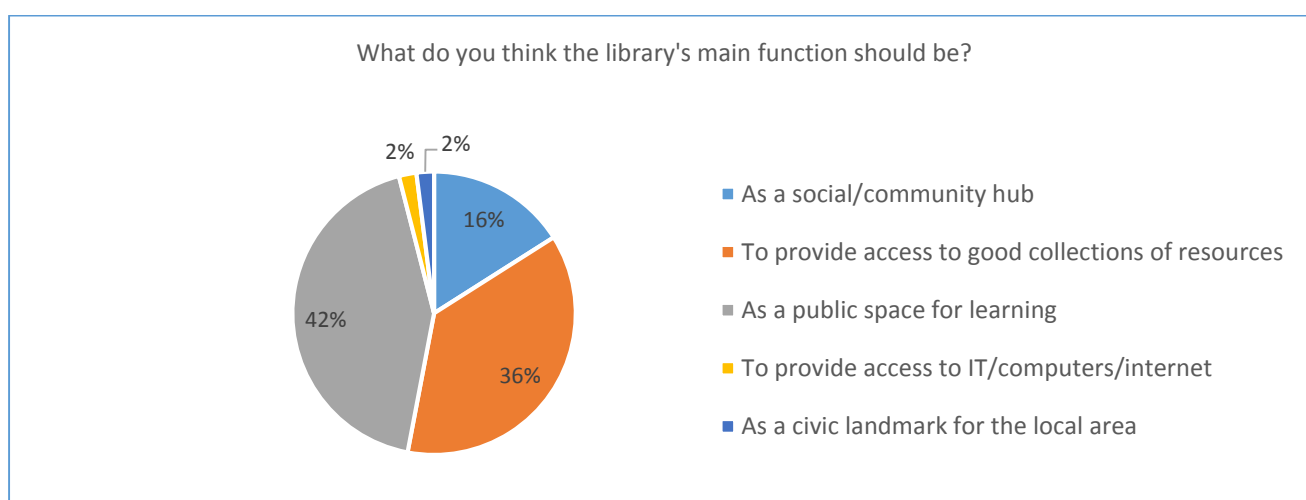
User satisfaction with CWL is reinforced in the responses to this question about how well the library meets respondents' individual needs with 92% saying that it meets their needs either well (58%) or very well (34%). 6% responded that it does not meet their needs very well, while no respondents answered "not well at all." Of those who responded that the library does not meet their needs very well, most of them gave an insight into why in their responses to Q29. These are discussed in Section 4.8.

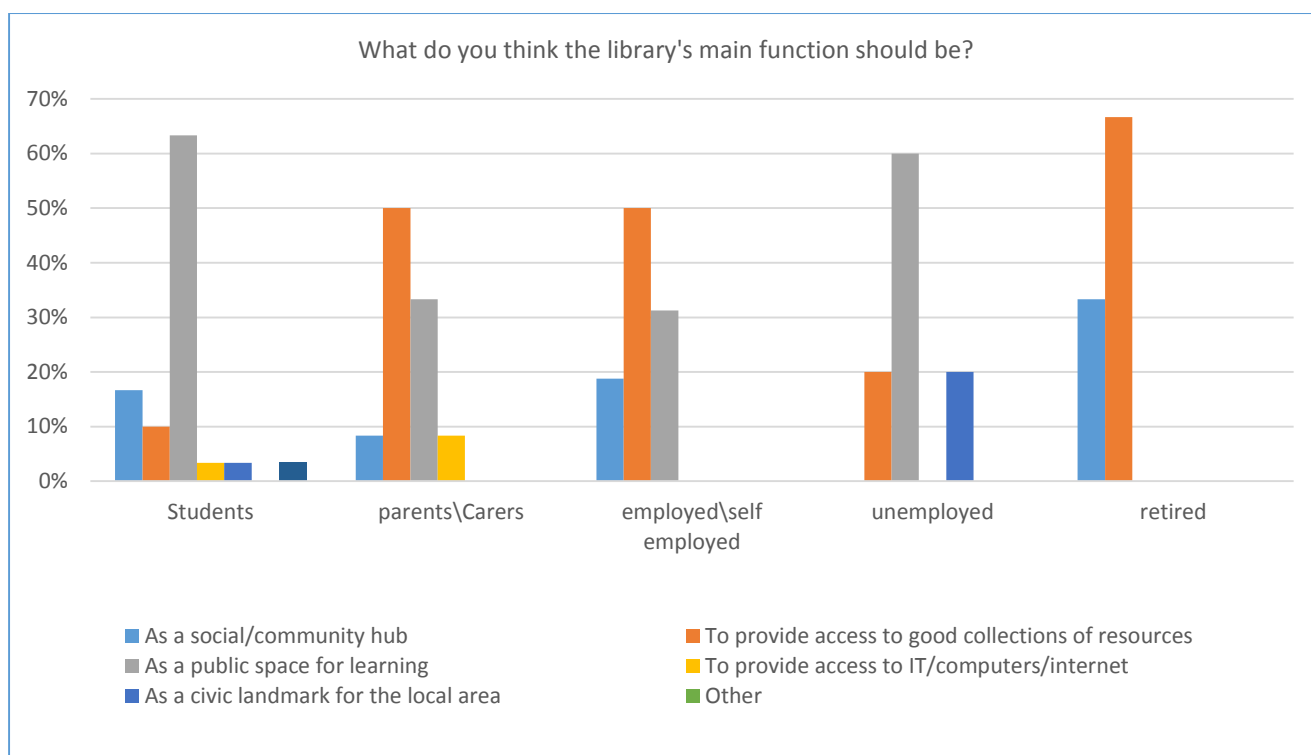


Q28. What do you think the library's main function should be?

Respondents were given six options to choose from (including an option to use their own words) to describe what the main function of their library should be? Options were devised from terms found in the literature and in the MOA data which respondents had used to describe modern libraries which were familiar to them. Respondents who were helped with their questionnaires admitted they found it difficult to choose one option as they felt that their library should be (and is) a combination of one or more options in reality. The results show a split among respondents. 42% thought that its main function should be as a public space for learning, 36% responded that it should provide access to good collections of resources and 16% opted for "a social/community hub". Much smaller percentages thought the library should serve as a civic landmark (2%) or be there to provide access to IT infrastructure (2%). While two-thirds of users surveyed responded that IT facilities are important or very important to them in the previous Q22, responses to this question indicate that they may be regarded as "added value" rather than an essential part of the library's function.

A closer look at the responses revealed significantly higher percentages of student and unemployed people thought that the library's main function should be as a public space for learning compared with parents/carers, employed/self-employed and retired people who thought that access to good collections is the library's main function.





4.5 Location – what it means to users of CWL

Fisher et al (2007, p 138) identify location as key to defining and understanding ‘place’ and survey respondents in their case study of Seattle Central Library reaffirmed that a convenient, central location with good transport links was of great importance to them. The MOA respondents in Black’s study also identified location as important to them. This is also borne out by positive responses from CWL’s users to where their library is located and its impact on the local area.

Respondents rated highly the fact that the library is close to their homes, has good transport links, and is located in an area with other facilities they use such as shops, cafes, leisure centres etc. Being close to schools and gyms was also mentioned in the response to the open-ended questions. Users who live locally (and those who don’t) have a sense of pride in their library and the contribution it is making to the local area and community. Users also seem to agree with Worpole’s (2013) view that “the library really does function as an integrating feature in the social landscape” by saying that they thought it fits in well with local environment and surrounding area. However, a much smaller percentage thought it needed to.

38% of respondents used the space at the end of the Location section to comment on other broader aspects of the library (see Appendix 4) but of those who commented on the location, many said that the library is in a convenient and accessible location, close to shops and good transportation links and is an asset to the local community. Examples of what users think of the location of the library include:

“Very convenient, one of the more beautiful buildings here,” “location is perfect,” “It is very convenient, nice area and it suits it having a library here.”

Others talk about the wider importance of the library’s location and well as the library’s wider function:

“It is a key part of the community. Very nice, light building. Somewhere to go that doesn’t require money. Can use computers if you don’t have one at home. Great selection of material, very nice staff.”

Others feel that more could be done to the area, an indication perhaps that the regeneration is ongoing and there are still improvements to be made:

"It is a shame the plaza isn't developed more. Restaurants have not been rented out" and "It's fantastic - and great how far this area has come and the investment the council has put in it. Still needs a wider town centre in this area though - which may come with the development of Surrey Quays etc."

4.6 Design – beyond the hype, what do people really think of CWL?

As with the MOA responses in Black's (2011) study, responses were very varied from users of CWL on what they think of the library architecture and its interior and exterior design. Those who were helped to fill in their questionnaires often had very strong opinions to share on the exterior design, in particular, with many commenting on its unusual pyramid shape and praising the quality of the building design and ultra-modern appearance. A few described it to me as "iconic" which is an adjective which could have perhaps been included in the options available to respondents in Q11. 11% choose to describe the library in their own words:

"nice!" "unique," "cold, aloof," "missable," "brown," "not sure what they were aiming for originally. Dull outer appearance, colour scheme nice though," "the library does not look like a library at all from the outside," difficult to tell it's a library," "not my choice but not bad," "the building is unusual but I didn't realise it was the local library until I looked it up online. It doesn't advertise that it's a library straight away."

The exploration of whether or not their library fits in well with the other buildings around it revealed that the majority of users think CWL does fit in well in its surroundings. This adds to evidence from the MOA data that more recent, modern libraries do fit well in to high streets and city centres. Perhaps an interesting point to make here is that attitudes with regard to whether new library buildings have to fit in at all may be changing with over 40% of respondents in this study saying that it is not important that they do.

On the question of comparative architectural styles and CWL users' attitudes to different public library buildings explored in Q14, it is also worth noting that there may be some bias towards a positive attitude to modern library buildings here as respondents are users of such a library. If the subject of this study had been an older, traditional-style library, the responses may have reflected a preference for that style. That said, it was evident from the responses given to the questions on design that users are on the whole happy with the look and feel of CWL. No-one used the kind of terminology used by respondents in the MOA study to describe modern library buildings such as bland, dull, drab or soulless and only 2% chose to describe it as "lacking in character." This perhaps signifies that modern library design in the 21st century has learnt lessons from the 20th century, especially the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s era which many MOA respondents regarded as a particularly grim era for public library buildings in the UK to design library buildings which are aesthetically pleasing *and* functional and which as a result are more popular with their users.

The majority of respondents chose one of the more positive options to describe the inside of their library. The majority of respondents who chose to describe the library's interior in the own words (10%) also chose to describe it in positive terms:

"Stunningly good", "a great place for self-study", "modern, great lighting, good views", "light, airy and comfortable" and "open yet cosy. Enjoyed hearing the drum lesson and seeing the community within the building," "quiet," "modern yet comfortable."

Some more negative comments were noted, however:

“too open,” “busy, muddled, confused,” “lots of books around would be the ideal description”

Answers to Q18 provide evidence of users’ attitudes to features such as accessibility and the view and open-plan layout which would have been key to discussions and consultation on the original design brief by designers, library and council staff and other stakeholders involved in the design process. It is encouraging that the features which underpinned the vision to create a multi-purpose, accessible, sustainable and flexible library are valued by the people who actually use it.

4.7 Use of Space – the library as a growing organism?

Dowlin (2004, p 12) cites Ranganathan’s Fifth Law of Library Science “a library is a growing organism” to illustrate the point that library spaces, their ‘form,’ should reflect their ‘function’ and react and evolve to meet the changing needs of their users. CWL was conceived as a library which would be many things to many people and evidence from the responses above suggest that it is succeeding in satisfying many (if not all) of the needs of its diverse users, 92% of whom said their needs are being met very well or well. The results above also reveal that a large percentage (62%) use the library regularly, another good indicator of user satisfaction.

Questions which explore what users use the library for reveal that the highest proportion of CWL users come to study and carry out research (39%.) Longitudinal observation of patterns of use may have been more meaningful to study this particular aspect of the research as it is much easier to ask people who are studying or doing research to fill in a questionnaire (because they are sitting at a desk) than it is to ask people who are browsing or meeting friends or quickly returning/borrowing books. This may have led a larger proportion of the sample answering that they are using the library to study or conduct research.

The results also provide evidence that CWL’s users value the different spaces within their library very highly and this is shown to be across the board, across all user groups. Comparatively low percentages of respondents said that the areas they were asked about are not important at all (all less than 10%) but those who responded that they do not use certain areas at all provides evidence of areas which may be under-utilised by certain user groups. For example, it is interesting to note that over two-thirds of retired users never use the café or meeting/learning rooms. This could be an opportunity for CWL to introduce offers and services relevant or targeted to them although the percentage of retired respondents here is very small.

While CWL’s users are almost unanimously proud of their library, only small percentage chose to describe the building as civic landmark.

4.8 Discussion of Free-text responses

As mentioned previously, respondents were given the opportunity on two separate occasions to add their comments about the location and use and division of space of their library at the end of the Location section (already discussed above) and in response to Q29 which asked *What would you improve about the library space?* The aim of these open-ended questions was to provide some qualitative data to compliment the quantitative data from the rest of the questionnaire. See Appendices 4 and 5.

63% of respondents added their comments and while many respondents used Q29 to voice their strong opinions about what they think CWL needs to change in order to improve the space, particularly with regard to more study space and more defined, quiet areas in general, a handful took this opportunity to say that they would not change anything and that the library is perfect as it is. Others commented that the café on the ground floor should reopen, that the lighting could be improved for reading on the first floor, more comfortable seating or “lounge areas” should be provided and the children’s library could be improved with murals and better seating for young families. Practical post-occupancy evaluation in the form of user feedback is an important, yet under-used, part of library design and planning (Worpole, 2013, p167) and in this case, the survey data gathered here (and the data instrument used) could prove useful to Southwark Council and others on future library projects.

Two main themes emerged from the free-text responses. Some users at CWL want clearer division of the space with separate, private areas for quiet reading and/or study with one user suggesting *“make it really separate from the rest of the library so it is quieter.”* This in spite of the fact that the adult study space is located separately on the floor above the main adult and children’s library and two floors above the foyer and café. Another respondent said *“make the children’s areas more closed. Keep it quiet. Set up telephone talking areas”* echoing the need for clearly defined areas to combat noise from the other areas of the library. Some respondents may have been influenced by a drumming workshop on the ground floor during one of the visits which may have made the thorny issue of noise more prevalent. One respondent even suggested soundproofing the study area.

The other theme which emerged is that the study space provided is inadequate, is often busy with no spare desks available and many who commented that the library does not make the best use of its space (Q25) commented that they would like to see more study space, more physical desks and chairs, and more private areas if possible for quiet reading and study purposes. Another commented that *“the central staircase takes up too much space and is detrimental to the overall “reading space”, ““more computers and desks to study. They are so busy all the time!”*

Responses given to Q29 also give insight into why certain users feel that the space does not meet their needs very well. Of the 6% who answered Q27 in this way, they responded that the *“children’s area [should be] cornered off,”* they needed and *“the children should be enclosed in order to minimise noise/distraction for those doing serious academic research/reading,”*

Other more general recommendations to improve the space included:

“more study spaces and quiet areas. Café which serves the community better, more interested in being a friendly community space/hub. Children’s area should be more defined. But it is a library which invests in books which is rare for a modern library.”

Staff members shared similar opinions in Q29’s free text responses: *“I would not have made it open-plan”, “Have a contained children’s section. Have a contained study space,”* perhaps reflecting the views of their users whose opinions and behaviour they have no doubt listened to and witnessed first-hand. The staff member who strongly disagreed with Q27 suggested that in fact way forward is *“a joined-up consultation that takes the opinions of both staff and public into account and acts upon it. Having an architect with a record of building libraries, and then consulting with staff about plans.”*

5. Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine in depth one example of a new purpose-built library in the UK to provide evidence of current attitudes to and perceptions of a modern library. It then sought to contextualise the limited findings of the case study research in the broader debate on the role and function of public libraries today.

The findings and discussion in Section 4 offer a unique perspective on CWL as a library which matters to its users, is largely succeeding in meeting their needs and is providing a meaningful function in a suitable location in the heart of the local community it serves.

Some specific conclusions can be drawn from the results of the questionnaire by looking at the three particular aspects which users were asked to think about – location, design and use of space – the findings provide evidence that users value their library spaces and services highly, feel a sense of pride in their library and the contribution it is making to their local community and environment.

The responses to questions in the questionnaire about location provide evidence that location is key to a large proportion of users (91%) and that they place value on the library's proximity to shops, public transport and most importantly, their homes. This echoes other case study research into new, purpose-built libraries in centrally located areas like Seattle Public Library reviewed in the literature.

CWL is also proving to be a library which attracts users for whom location is not a factor when deciding to come to the library. Those are not from the local area or for whom, it is not their closest library (almost half of the users in this survey). This illustrates the point that new libraries are often succeeding in becoming 'destination' libraries which draw people in, not because of where they are located but for other reasons, in CWL's case because it's new (27%) or the services/resources it offers appeal to them (39%) or because they prefer it to other libraries. This differentiation factor could be crucial for public libraries in the future with users looking for the added-value that new, well-equipped, well-resourced libraries provide.

As discussed previously, a large majority of CWL's users in this survey feel a great sense of pride in their library (91%). This echoes the pride that many users in Black's study associate with older, Victorian-era buildings and could signify a shift in public perceptions of modern libraries. Users are also proud of the positive impact the library is having on the local area. CWL is pivotal to Southwark Council's vision for the regeneration of Rotherhithe and Surrey Quays and it is encouraging that its users also feel strongly about the part their library is playing in it.

The findings also reflect CWL's users' largely positive attitude to the way the library looks, both inside and out, with a very small percentage of users choosing to describe the interior and exterior design of the library using negative terms, though there is no consensus among the users surveyed here about how they would describe them. Neither is there consensus from users about whether they prefer modern library buildings to older, traditional library buildings. There appears to be no real change in attitudes since Black's MOA data was collected in 2005 though it is not possible to compare directly. However, it can be concluded that older, traditional buildings are marginally less popular with this user sample than modern libraries and that in fact a majority had no preference for either style.

On other aspects of design, the responses provide evidence that users value CWL as a library building which is accessible, sustainable and offers them a view and an open-plan layout, reflecting the library's vision and that of its architects and stakeholders. Responses yielded other features which could have

been explored here and could be added for future research projects such as lighting and natural lighting.

It can be concluded from responses to the questions on use of space that CWL is a library which its users like using and use regularly (62% more than once a week.) When library use figures and visitor numbers in public libraries up and down the country tell a story of an institution and a service if not in crisis, as some say, but at a crossroads, CWL along with other new libraries built in the last decade, is bucking the trend and is attracting users and keeping them, three years after opening.

The responses also provide evidence that many of CWL's users value most aspects of the physical library space highly as well as services, resources and facilities which the building offers them. The library is also providing a good balance of resources to nearly three-quarters of its users (71%.) And crucially a very high percentage of users' needs are being met, according to the results from this survey.

CWL means different things to different people and it is succeeding in meeting a range of users' needs by providing a space and service which is flexible, has good collections of resources and which serves its community of users well. This may be as a public place for learning, a social/community hub, a provider of resources and IT or as a civic landmark, its users are divided on how best to describe it. Interestingly, users still value core functions of providing good collections of books and other resources (94%) and availability of or help from staff (92%) the most highly of all features but free wifi/internet is also not surprisingly a welcome feature to the library and one which the recent DCMS (2014) report recommended should be available in all public libraries. Diversification to include community activities and services is also seen as a positive step.

In conclusion, this case study serves as a good illustration of the main issues debated in the literature on how new libraries *are* assets when they provide users with the kinds of spaces and services they need and provides a window into current 2014 attitudes to a modern library space. CWL should be seen as example of good practice which could be used to inform other library design projects and as a public library building which makes its users proud. Do bricks and mortar matter? They do in Southwark.

6. Reflection

Library spaces and their evolution has been a research topic of interest to me for some time. It was a topic which I researched for the Library and Information Science Foundation (LISF) module at City and which I thought would make an interesting dissertation topic. After an initial search of the literature, it became clear that it is topic area which has been studied in depth and I had concerns about the originality and value of yet another dissertation covering the same ground. Finding Black's (2011) study which looked at attitudes to public library buildings as documented in the Mass Observation Archive narrowed the scope and provided an interesting starting point for a new study. It also provided a unique source of data to analyse and reflect on. A case study methodology to focus on a single subject library further narrowed the scope and would potentially add detail to the wider debates within the literature.

Access to a suitable newly built public library was a determining factor in pursuing the topic further and I drew up a shortlist of potential case study subjects based on a brief look at the LIS literature and popular press. At the top of the list was the new Library of Birmingham. After making initial contact with Birmingham City Council, it soon been apparent that access to carry out an on-site questionnaire might be difficult. Due to the fact that it had opened only a year earlier, requests to carry out academic research of all kinds were numerous and access to staff who could help facilitate visits proved difficult. The distance from London to Birmingham was also a consideration given the time-frame of the project. Staff at Canada Water Library were quick to respond by email to my request to carry out a research project and were very helpful throughout the process and I had visited the library earlier in the year so was familiar with its building and its suitability for this research project.

The process was a challenging yet rewarding one and it helped me to develop skills which I did not have before. I had originally wanted to carry out a project which would primarily encompass desk research so the prospect of face-to-face contact with library users was initially daunting. This proved, however, to be one of the most rewarding parts of the process and one which also helped my confidence. Engaging with library users and staff and seeing that a topic which interested me also interested others was fulfilling and made the project very worthwhile. If the project time-scales had allowed, I would have liked to conduct either more observation of library use or focus groups with users for a more holistic insight into attitudes and use of the space, with CWL's permission.

I was also inexperienced in designing a questionnaire so relied heavily on examples from the literature to guide me. The pilot study I carried out was invaluable to adapt the draft version of the questionnaire in response to users' feedback and where confusion arose during both the answering of the questions and the interpretation of the results. Whilst the final questionnaire is far from perfect, I believe it helped meet the objectives of the research adequately by gaining an insight into current attitudes and perceptions of CWL's users. Though the sample is relatively small, I feel the results are valid, the research method is transferable and I hope the findings may be of value to the case study library, not least to demonstrate value and illustrate good practice.

The interpretation of the final data was a much more time-consuming and challenging part of the process than I anticipated and I feel that I needed more time to analyse and present the findings better. As an inexperienced, first-time data analyst, time-management and planning of this section could definitely have been improved and I hope to learn lessons from this research process which I can take on board for future projects.

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Appendix 1. Proposal

Title: The great public libraries debate – Do bricks and mortar still matter?

Subtitle: A UK public library case study examining current attitudes to public library spaces.

Introduction

Recent high-profile public library building projects in the UK like Library of Birmingham, Canada Water, Cardiff, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Brighton have reignited the long-standing debate on the value, meaning and relevance of public libraries in the 21st century. The public library divides both scholarly and popular opinion as either a place which continues to play an important civic, social and cultural role or one which is an anachronism in the digital information age.

While investment flourishes in both new ‘flagship’ public library buildings and major city library renovation projects like those in Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow, library closures, funding cuts and low lending statistics across the public library sector as a whole are well-documented and well-publicised, leading the library profession and the library and information science (LIS) scholarly community to evaluate and debate the present and future purpose of public libraries. In fact, the fate of public libraries is an emotive subject for library users, LIS professionals and scholars alike and one which is often prone to generalisations – all public libraries are worth saving or conversely, they are all redundant and out-dated and serve no real purpose in today’s society where information access is ubiquitous.

For this reason, this dissertation will examine in depth one example of a newly/recently built library in the UK to provide evidence of current attitudes to and perceptions of one modern public library space and its functions. Using a case study method, it will collect and evaluate users’ attitudes to library design (the library as a built form, the library as ‘place’) as well as ‘libraryness’ (the importance of collections and services in public libraries and their wider social and community function.) It will also seek to contextualise the limited findings of the case study research in the broader debate on the role of public libraries today – no longer simply physical storage spaces for their collections but as spaces which cater for the evolving demands of their users in a digital information society.

Aims and objectives

This dissertation will provide a case study of a recently built public library to illustrate changing attitudes to and use of public library spaces in the UK. It will draw on a previous study carried out by Black (2011) which analysed data gathered in a Mass Observation Archive (MOA) ‘Public Library Buildings’ directive in 2005 whereby volunteers were asked to comment on the design and functionality of public library buildings. It will aim to summarise and reflect on their responses which offered insights into how ordinary people felt about library spaces at a particular time.

While the MOA data is useful in providing a fascinating ‘snapshot’ of general viewpoints and thinking on public library buildings by both library users and non-users, this dissertation’s main objective will be to build on Black’s study by gathering opinions from users at a single case study library in order to seek a contemporary viewpoint a decade on. It is hoped that the evidence will add detail to the broader, more

general extant literature on public library spaces in the UK and evaluate if and how attitudes are changing and reflect on the extent to which new public libraries are succeeding in meeting users' needs.

Scope and definitions

The scope of this dissertation is largely defined by its case study methodology. It will offer a limited insight into one recently built public library in order to contribute to the extensive research into public libraries both historically and in recent years as their role and significance has evolved and as investment in new library builds has flourished.

Within LIS, public libraries offer a unique perspective on evolving popular trends in and attitudes to reading, books, e-books, digital information, the broad role of the library, universal access to services, technologies and facilities, public spaces in general and so on, and as such, continue to serve as a useful barometer of library trends in general.

This dissertation will provide a brief and general overview of the historical evolution of public libraries in the UK from the relevant literature as detailed below. It will then reflect on why public library spaces are still needed, if and why they matter to users, what is important to them, what they use the space for, what their preferences are and whether the space itself meets their needs. This overview will focus primarily on public libraries in the UK and will specifically consider libraries which have been newly or recently built and ones which have undergone renovation projects in order to transform their spaces.

It will summarise the findings of Black's (2011) study of MOA data on attitudes to public library buildings in the UK and will carry out a case study as a contemporary illustration of library users' perceptions and attitudes to public library spaces.

Research context/literature review

As mentioned above, research into library spaces and places is extensive in the LIS and social sciences book and journal literature and covers academic, school, professional, special and public libraries. It also cover a wide range of aspects from historical studies of how library spaces, collections and services have evolved in the digital age, contemporary studies of use and division of space, hybrid and virtual library models and so on.

Many general texts on public libraries (Usherwood, 2008; Hernon and Matthews, 2013; Molz and Dain, 2001) offer useful commentaries on key trends and issues in the UK and elsewhere while others focus specifically on UK public libraries, their history and evolution and current and future prospects (Black and Pepper, 2012; McMenemy, 2009.)

For the purposes of this dissertation, the literature review will draw on the literature above to gain a background understanding of public libraries in the 21st century. It will also include studies and research papers whose main subject focus is public library spaces or 'library as place' which offer a comparative international insight into some of the main areas for debate (Buschman and Leckie, 2007; Bisbrouck, 2004; Dewe, 2006, Niegaard, 2011, Aabo and Audunson, 2012.) It will also look at prior research methods used for studies of public library spaces including case study research carried out on specific public libraries (Sequeiros, 2013: May, 2011) as well as ethnographic studies observing user behaviour and use and navigation of public library spaces (Bilandzic and Foth, 2013.) LIS journals such as *Library Trends*, *New Library World*, *Library and Information Research*, *Journal of Documentation*, *Journal of*

Library and Information Science, *Public Library Quarterly* and *Library Hi Tech* will be particularly useful in providing background context and further examples of prior research conducted.

In addition to the scholarly LIS literature, it will be crucial to look at recent policy reviews, reports and data on UK public libraries published by government (Department of Media, Culture and Sport), the advisory body for libraries, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), the Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU) and library advocacy organisations and professional bodies such as CILIP, CIPFA, Society of Chief Librarians and ALMA UK to give broader 'state of the state' context. While this will not be a detailed analysis, it will offer insights from other key stakeholders in the public library debate.

Finally, an historical or background exploration of the case study library will also be carried out which will include press articles and the library's (or council's) own literature either from its website or from information leaflets, brochures and so on.

Methodology

This dissertation will use a single case study as its main research method, using a questionnaire survey of library users at the case study library as its data collection instrument. The survey will be adapted from questions and responses in the study carried out by Black (2011), as outlined in the previous section. Those responses will also be analysed as part of the literature review as a contextual basis for the case study. The questionnaire will comprise both open and closed questions to allow for both tick-box answers and freer commentary on their attitudes to and use of the library space.

The study will be limited to one example of a recently built library in the UK but will serve as an illustration of current attitudes and trends and could form the basis for other case studies or be applied to other research approaches in the future.

Work Plan/Schedule

May 2014

Secure access to case study library by following up emails and forwarding research proposal to them.

June 2014 1-3 days

Visit The Keep, University of Sussex, Brighton to look at Mass Observation Archive (MOA) 'Public Library Buildings' directive respondents' data from 2005 (1 box, 180 responses.) Access to the documents is free but there would be nominal travel expenses from London to Brighton.

June 2014

Compile literature review as outlined above

June 2014

Adaptation of MOA questions/responses for case study library questionnaire survey. Feedback or input would be sought by library staff at the case study library to ensure that it makes sense and is easy to understand for library users.

July 2014

Pilot survey. This will ideally be carried out again with the help of library staff at the case study library.

July/August 2014

Survey of library users at Case Study library.

August/September 2014

Data analysis of survey responses

September-December 2014

Compile case study narrative including survey responses and case study background literature. Present findings and conclusions.

Resources

Access to the City University Library and local University of Westminster Library for physical and digital resources will be required for the background literature analysis. This will include access to e-journals, books and ebooks.

Access to the internet and printer at home and at locations above will be essential and will facilitate the wider literature analysis of non-scholarly literature as detailed in the Research context/literature review section above.

Access to the Mass Observation Archive (MOA) at The Keep, University of Sussex, Brighton. Registration as a reader is confirmed and a search on the relevant 2005 directive has been carried out to ensure its availability.

Access to a case study library is to be confirmed. Contact has been made with the Library of Birmingham and Canada Water Library in London by email. Awaiting replies or referrals to library staff. Third-choice Clapham Library will also be contacted in the event that first choices deny access. Travel expenses will be incurred to and from the case study library for the purposes of making initial face to face contact and conducting the survey. Nominal printing costs will also be incurred to print out copies of the survey questionnaires to be completed by library users.

Ethics

There are no foreseeable ethical issues with this research project. The researcher will ensure that the human participants invited to complete the survey will be informed as to its purpose in person and will be informed how the answers they give will be used. They will also have an opportunity to refuse to participate should they choose to. They will be reassured that if they do not wish to complete the survey questionnaire there is no penalty for doing so.

The researcher will not knowingly target any of the vulnerable groups as defined in the ethical checklist i.e. pregnant women, children, vulnerable adults or people with learning difficulties. Consent will not be sought from participants in the survey as personal data (such as name, email address or library ID) will not be requested. No guarantees have or will be made to keep participants' answers confidential.

The survey will be conducted on site at the case study library and there are no foreseeable risks to carrying out the survey in a public library location such as the ones which have been approached for this project.

The City University Ethics Checklist is included as an appendix here.

Research Ethics Checklist

School of Informatics BSc MSc/MA Projects

If the answer to any of the following questions (1 – 3) is NO, your project needs to be modified.

Delete as appropriate

1. Does your project pose only minimal and predictable risk to you (the student)?
2. Does your project pose only minimal and predictable risk to other people affected by or participating in the project?
3. Is your project supervised by a member of academic staff of the School of Informatics or another individual approved by the module leaders?

Yes/No

Yes/No

Yes/No

If the answer to either of the following questions (4 – 5) is YES, you MUST apply to the University Research Ethics Committee for approval. (You should seek advice about this from your project supervisor at an early stage.)

Delete as appropriate

4. Does your project involve animals?
5. Does your project involve pregnant women or women in labour?

Yes/No

Yes/No

If the answer to the following question (6) is YES, you MUST complete the remainder of this form (7 – 19). If the answer is NO, you are finished.

Delete as appropriate

6. Does your project involve human participants? For example, as interviewees, respondents to a questionnaire or participants in evaluation or testing?

Yes/No

If the answer to any of the following questions (7 – 13) is YES, you MUST apply to the Informatics Research Ethics Panel for approval and your application may be referred to the University Research Ethics Committee. (You should seek advice about this from your project supervisor at an early stage.)

Delete as appropriate

7. Could your project uncover illegal activities?

Yes/No

8. Could your project cause stress or anxiety in the participants? **Yes/No**
9. Will you be asking questions of a sensitive nature? **Yes/No**
10. Does your project rely on covert observation of the participants? **Yes/No**
11. Does your project involve participants who are under the age of 18? **Yes/No**
12. Does your project involve adults who are vulnerable because of their social, psychological or medical circumstances (vulnerable adults)? **Yes/No**
13. Does your project involve participants who have learning difficulties? **Yes/No**

The following questions (14 – 16) must be answered YES, i.e. you MUST COMMIT to satisfy these conditions and have an appropriate plan to ensure they are satisfied.

Delete as appropriate

14. Will you ensure that participants taking part in your project are fully informed about the purpose of the research? **Yes/No**
15. Will you ensure that participants taking part in your project are fully informed about the procedures affecting them or affecting any information collected about them, including information about how the data will be used, to whom it will be disclosed, and how long it will be kept? **Yes/No**
16. When people agree to participate in your project, will it be made clear to them that they may withdraw (i.e. not participate) at any time without any penalty? **Yes/No**

The following questions (17 – 19) must be answered and the requested information provided.

Delete as appropriate

17. Will consent be obtained from the participants in your project? **Yes/No**
- Consent from participants will be necessary if you plan to gather personal, medical or other sensitive data about them. "Personal data" means data relating to an identifiable living person; e.g. data you collect using questionnaires, observations, interviews, computer logs. The person might be identifiable if you record their name, username, student id, DNA, fingerprint, etc.
- If YES, provide the consent request form that you will use and indicate who will obtain the consent, how are you intending to arrange for a copy of the signed consent form for the participants, when will they receive it and how long the participants will have between receiving information about the study and giving consent, and when the filled consent request forms will be available for inspection (NOTE: subsequent failure to provide the filled consent request forms will automatically result in withdrawal of any earlier ethical approval of your project):*
18. Have you made arrangements to ensure that material and/or private information obtained from or about the participating individuals will remain confidential? **Yes/No**

Provide details:

19. Will the research be conducted in the participant's home or other non-
location? **Yes/No** University

*If **YES**, provide details of how your safety will be preserved:*

The survey will be conducted on site at the case study library.

Templates

The templates available from the links below **must** be adapted according to the needs of your project before they are submitted for consideration. The sample form provided for projects involving children is to be used by the parents/guardians of the children participating in the research project.

Adult information sheet:

http://www.city.ac.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0018/153441/TEMPLATE-FOR-PARTICIPANT-INFORMATION-SHEET.doc

Adult consent form: http://www.city.ac.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0004/153418/TEMPLATE-FOR-CONSENT-FORM.doc

Child information sheet: http://www.city.ac.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0003/153462/Sample-Child-Information-Sheet.doc

Child consent form:

http://www.city.ac.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0020/153461/Sample-child-consent-1.doc

Appendix 2. Draft Questionnaire

LOCATION

1. How important is the location of your library to you?

Very important/Important/Not very important/Not important at all

2. How did you get to the library today?

a. on foot

b. by bicycle

c. by tube

d. by train

e. by bus

f. by car

g. other, please specify _____

3. Please tell me how important each of these things are when thinking about the location of your library? That your library is

Very important/Important/Not very important/Not important at all/N/A

Next to the tube/train/bus station?

Within walking distance of your home?

Within walking distance of your workplace?

Close to other facilities like a doctors' surgery or leisure centre?

Close to other amenities like shops and cafés?

Other, please state _____

4. Are you more likely to visit a new library like this one or an older one?

a. More likely

b. Less likely

c. I come here because it's my local library

5. Do you use any other public libraries? If so, why?

- a. because they are closer to my home
- b. because they are closer to my workplace
- c. because they have more books that I like
- d. because they have more quiet/private areas
- e. because they are older and I prefer older libraries
- f. I don't use any other libraries

6. If this is not your closest library, do you come here because

- a. it is new and I like the feel of it
- b. it has more facilities than other libraries I use
- c. it is on my way to/from work
- d. I am in the area for other reasons like shopping or leisure activities

7. The library is part of a wider regeneration of the whole Rotherhithe area. Do you think it has an important role in this regeneration?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

8. Do you think having a new modern library here is good for the local area and community?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

9. Are you proud of your library and how it looks?

a. Yes

b. No

c. N/A

Please add your own comments here

DESIGN

EXTERIOR

10. How would you describe the outside of the library building?

a. eye-catching and cutting-edge

b. modern and hi-tech

c. uplifting and inspiring

d. sympathetic to other buildings nearby

e. out of place with immediate surroundings

f. or in your own words _____

11. Do you think the library fits in with other buildings in the local area?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Not sure/Don't know

12. How important is it that the library fits in with its immediate surroundings?

Very important Important Not very important Not important at all

13. Which of the following statements would best describe your attitude to library buildings?

a. I prefer modern library buildings

b. I prefer older, traditional library buildings

c. I have no preference for modern or older library buildings

- d. Architecture doesn't matter - it is what the library offers which counts
- e. I don't have an opinion to share on this

INTERIOR

14. Which of these best describes the inside of the library building for you?

- a. light and airy
- b. modern and hi-tech
- c. cosy and comfortable
- d. a welcoming community space
- e. a place of sanctuary
- e. unwelcoming and unfriendly
- f. or in your own words _____

15. Would you like to see more private, quiet areas in the library?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure/Don't know

16. Should the library computers be in separate area to the books and other resources?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure/Don't know

17. Now thinking about the library's overall design, how important are these aspects of the library to you?

Very important/Important/Not very Important/Not important at all/N/A

Its sustainability

Its ease of access/accessibility

Its quiet areas

Its open-plan layout

18. Modern libraries are often criticised as being drab and soulless or lacking in atmosphere and character. Do you agree with this statement?

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

USE OF SPACE

19. What do you usually use the library for?

- a. borrowing books
- b. borrowing CDs/DVDs/games
- c. reading/browsing books and/or reference collection
- d. accessing the internet on the library computers
- e. studying/research
- f. visiting the café
- g. reading newspapers/magazines
- h. meeting people
- i. attending workshops/community activities like book groups
- j. Other, please specify _____

20. What is the main purpose of your visit to the library today?

- a. borrowing/returning books
- b. borrowing/returning CDs/DVDs/games
- c. visiting the café
- d. an event in the Culture Space
- e. visiting the children's library
- f. a special event in the children's library?
- g. academic study/research
- h. researching family or local history
- i. reading newspapers/magazines
- j. using reference collection
- k. accessing the internet/library catalogue from the library computers
- l. meeting friends

m. a workshop/activity in one of the meeting rooms

n. other, please specify _____

21. How often do you use this library?

a. More than once a week

b. Once a week

c. Twice a month

d. Once a month

e. Once every two months

f. Less frequently

g. I hardly ever use the library

22. How important are each of these areas in the library to you?

Very important/Important/Not very Important/Not important at all/N/A

a. the quiet study area

b. the Culture Space

c. the café

d. the children's library and seating area

e. the comfortable seating areas

f. the meeting and learning rooms

g. other, please specify _____

23. How important are each of these aspects of the library to you?

Very important/Important/Not very Important/Not important at all/N/A

a. help from and availability of library staff

b. library computers

c. free wifi/internet access

d. good collection of books and other resources

e. access to latest titles

f. community activities like reading groups

g. community information boards and leaflets

- h. photocopiers/printers
- i. self-check automated lending kiosks
- j. other, please specify _____

24. How do you find out about what is going on in the library and the services it provides?

- a. visit the library
- b. speak to a librarian
- c. visit the library website
- d. visit other libraries in the borough
- e. word of mouth
- f. other, please specify _____

25. In your opinion, does the library make the best use of its space?

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree or disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

26. Do you think the library provides a good balance of books and other materials (like CDs, DVDs, newspapers and magazines) and computer facilities?

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree or disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

27. How well does library meet your needs?

Very well

Well

Not very well

Not at all

Please use this space to tell us more

28. What would you improve about the library space?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please now tell us a little bit about you

29. Are you

- a. Male?
- b. Female?

30. Are you

- a. 18-24
- b. 25-44
- c. 45-64
- d. 65+

31. Are you

- a. a student
- b. a parent/carer of young children
- c. employed/self-employed
- d. unemployed
- e. retired
- f. Other, please state _____

Thank you for taking the time to take part in this survey.

Appendix 3. Final Questionnaire

Public libraries – a survey of library users' attitudes to a modern library space.

Thank you for taking the time to complete my questionnaire.

I am a post-graduate student in Library Science at City University in London and I am conducting a survey as part of my dissertation on public library buildings and why they are important places. The answers you provide will give me an insight into current attitudes to a purpose-built modern library in the heart of a community and how it meets your needs and expectations.

I would also like to know a little about you so that I can build up a picture of who uses this library, how often and why. As well as helping with my research, I hope the survey will be useful to library staff and to Southwark Council to inform future planning on libraries and library services across the borough.

The questionnaire is in **three** parts looking at **LOCATION**, **DESIGN** and **USE OF SPACE**. Please answer as many questions as you can. It should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. All responses are anonymous and the results of the survey will be made available to the library on completion of the study.

LOCATION

1. How important is the location of the library to you?

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all

2. How did you travel to the library today?

☐ On foot ☐ By bicycle ☐ By bus
☐ By tube ☐ By train ☐ By car
☐ Other, please specify _____

3. Thinking about the location of the library, how important is it to you that it is

Next to the tube/train/bus station

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Within walking distance of your home

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Within walking distance of your workplace

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Close to other facilities (eg health centre, leisure centre, shops, cafes and restaurants)

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

4. Is this your nearest local library?

☐ Yes ☐ No

5. If the answer to Q4 is No, do you come here because

- ☐ It is new and I prefer it to other libraries ☐ It has better facilities/events than other libraries I use
- ☐ It is on my way to/from work ☐ I come to this area for other reasons eg shopping or leisure activities
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

6. Are you more likely to visit a new library like this one than an older, more traditional library?

- ☐ More likely ☐ Less likely ☐ N/A

7. Do you use any other public libraries? If so, why?

- ☐ They are closer to my home ☐ They are closer to my workplace
- ☐ They have more books that I like/need ☐ They have more quiet/private areas
- ☐ They are older and I prefer older libraries ☐ I don't use any other libraries
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

8. The library is part of a wider regeneration of the whole Rotherhithe/Canada Quays area. To what extent do you agree that it has an important role in this regeneration?

- ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

9. Do you think having a new modern library here is vital for the local area and community?

- ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

10. Are you proud of this library and how it looks?

- ☐ Yes | ☐ No | ☐ N/A

Please add any further comments about the library and its location here

DESIGN

11. How would you describe the outside of the library building? Please choose ONE option

- ☐ Eye-catching and cutting-edge ☐ Modern and hi-tech ☐ Uplifting and inspiring
- ☐ Sympathetic to surrounding area ☐ Out of place with surrounding area
- ☐ Or in your own words _____

12. Do you think the library fits in well with the other buildings around it?

☐ Yes | ☐ No

13. Is it important that the library fits in with its immediate surroundings?

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

14. Which of these best describes your attitude to public library buildings? Please choose ONE option

☐ I prefer modern library buildings

☐ I prefer older, traditional library buildings

☐ I have no preference for modern or older library buildings

☐ Architecture doesn't matter, it is what the library offers which counts

15. Which of these best describes the inside of the library for you? Please choose ONE option

☐ Light and airy

☐ Cosy and comfortable

☐ Lacking in character

☐ Welcoming community space

☐ Place of sanctuary

☐ Or in your own words _____

16. Would you like to see more private, quiet areas in this library?

☐ Yes | ☐ No

17. Should the library computers be in a separate area to the books and other resources?

☐ Yes | ☐ No

18. Thinking about the overall design of the library building, how important are each of these features to you?

Its accessibility/ease of access

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Its eco-friendly/sustainable design

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Its open-plan layout

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Its view overlooking Canada Water Basin

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Other, please specify _____

USE OF SPACE

19. How often do you use this library?

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> Once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> Less frequently | <input type="checkbox"/> I hardly ever use the library |

20. What do you usually use this library for?

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Borrowing books | <input type="checkbox"/> Borrowing CDs/DVDs/games | <input type="checkbox"/> Finding information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessing internet on library PCs | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying/research | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading newspapers/magazines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visiting the café | <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Workshop/community activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____ | | |

21. What is the main purpose of your visit to this library today? Please choose **ONE** option

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Borrowing/returning books | <input type="checkbox"/> Borrowing/returning CD/DVD/games | <input type="checkbox"/> Finding information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessing internet on library PCs | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying/research | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading newspapers/magazines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visiting the café | <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Workshop/community activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Event in the children's library | <input type="checkbox"/> Event in the Culture Space | <input type="checkbox"/> Researching family/local history |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____ | | |

22. How important are each of these spaces in the library to you?

Children's library and seating areas

- ☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ I don't use this area

Adult study space

- ☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ I don't use this area

Comfortable seating areas

- ☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ I don't use this area

Culture Space

- ☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ I don't use this area

Café

- ☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ I don't use this area

Meeting and learning rooms

- ☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ I don't use this area

23. How important are each of these aspects of the library to you?

Help from and availability of library staff

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Library computers

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Free wifi/internet access

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Good collection of books and other resources

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Access to latest titles

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Community activities like reading groups, foreign language classes

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Community information boards and leaflets

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

Photocopiers/printers/self-service machines

☐ Very important ☐ Important ☐ Not very important ☐ Not important at all ☐ N/A

24. How do you find out about what is going on in the library and the services it provides?

☐ Visit the library ☐ Speak to a librarian ☐ Visit the library website

☐ Visit other libraries in the borough ☐ Email/mailling list

☐ Other, please specify _____

25. Do you think this library makes the best use of its space?

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

26. Do you think this library provides the right balance between books and other materials (CDs, DVDs, newspapers) on the one hand and computer facilities on the other?

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither agree or disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

27. How well does this library meet your own needs?

☐ Very Well

☐ Well

☐ Not very well

☐ Not at all

28. What do you think the library's main function should be? Please choose ONE option

☐ as a social/community hub

☐ to provide access to good collections of resources (books, CDs etc)

☐ as a public space for learning

☐ to provide access to IT/computers/internet

☐ as a civic landmark for the local area

☐ Other, please state _____

29. What would you improve about the library space?

INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

30. Are you

☐ Male | ☐ Female |

31. Are you

☐ 18-24 | ☐ 25-44 | ☐ 45-64 | ☐ 65+ |

32. Are you

☐ A student

☐ Parent/carer of young children

☐ Employed/self-employed

☐ Unemployed

☐ Retired

☐ Other, please specify _____

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix 4. Free-text responses – Location

Please add any further comments about the library and its location here

- 1 It helps me study, layout and quiet areas good
- 2 Staff were friendlier at the old library
- 3 -
- 4 -
- 5 -
- 6 Children need to be confined and not crying
- 7 -
- 8 -
- 9 Very convenient, one of the more beautiful buildings here
- 10 -
- 11 -
- 12 -
- 13 -
- 14 -
- 15 -
- 16 -
- 17 Location is perfect
- 18 It needs more desks for studying not just computers. The view at the window is great but more desks to sit with books and notes in order to study properly is important. Some people prefer this.
- 19 -
- 20 -
- 21 -
- 22 -
- 23 The design is great. I love the windows and it's very light (bright)
- 24 -
- 25 -
- 26 The library is in a great location next to the tube. The main reason I come here (even when it is not my local library) is that it has good study space

- 27 -
- 28 In my opinion this is a really nice library and I also like the view from here to the Canada Water basin
- 29 -
- 30 It is very convenient, nice area and it suits it having a library here
- 31 -
- 32 -
- 33 -
- 34 -
- 35 I do not live in this area but I think it's a very good library. My three children and I enjoy coming here every Saturday from Waterloo
- 36 It is very important to have this modern library with clean toilets and disabled toilets and café and people can sit and read or just come here for events
- 37 Like a bloomin' market place
- 38 -
- 39 -
- 40 -
- 41 It is modern although the work places (desks) are limited
- 42 -
- 43 The selection of books is surprisingly impressive, printing is extortionately priced. The cultural centre is too loud – I'm upstairs trying to read and I can hear drumming - this is not a "library"
- 44 Well maintained and accessible, beautiful and calm location, activity-oriented and efficient staff
- 45 -
- 46 Close and convenient to shops, makes coming here easy. Good range of books. Close to recycling centre.
- 47 -
- 48 -
- 49 -
- 50 The layout and space is fantastic. I like the study space.
- 51 -
- 52 -
- 53 It is a shame the plaza isn't developed more. Restaurants have not been rented out.
- 54 -

- 55 It is a key part of the community. Very nice, light building. Somewhere to go that doesn't require money. Can use computers if you don't have one at home. Great selection of material, very nice staff.
- 57 -
- 58 Great architecture which is a nice extra feature.
- 59 -
- 61 -
- 62 -
- 63 -
- 64 -
- 65 Green environment very appreciated.
- 66 Good facilities, but a bit noisy (children screaming and crying). If possible set apart the adults' from children's area better.
- 67 Today the network isn't working very good.
- 68 -
- 69 -
- 70 -
- 71 -
- 72 It's fantastic - and great how far this area has come and the investment the council has put in it. Still needs a wider town centre in this area though - which may come with the development of Surrey Quays etc
- 73 Here seems so clean and tidy and we can take some books for free.
- 74 The location to many other facilities that may be needed occasionally, especially good for transportation
- 76 -
- 77 Very nice view
- 78 -
- 79 I don't like the look of it from the outside
- 80 It is a beautiful building, much better resources than other libraries
- 81 -
- 82 It's a good location as it's easily accessible for local people and visitors
- 83 -
- 84 We use the library for meetings and wish it would open later

- 85 -
- 86 -
- 87 -
- 88 -
- 89 It would be nice to have the meeting rooms opened so they can be used as study rooms at specific times
- 90 -
- 91 -
- 92 -
- 93 It is a well run library close to tube and buses and the shopping centre
- 94 Lovely views and relaxing to read and look at the water
- 95 It's just right
- 96 The library is open plan and therefore presents problems - the children's library is too close to a very dangerous staircase and noise tunnels upstairs because of the flue effect in the design. The 'quiet area' is affected by noise from all over the library including meeting room on the same floor holding really noisy events
- 97 -
- 98 Great for the local community, local residents, local students and local schools
- 99 -
- 100 -
- 101 -
- 102 The building is aesthetically pleasing but suffers from boneheaded design decisions that greatly decrease the functionality of the space. A vanity staircase that takes up 25% of the space, a tiny open plan children's library that carries noise into the "quiet" study area. An open plan library that tries to meld too many functions together and ends up delivering none. It is a library and a space that staff will be fighting with long after the flash of journalism cameras have dimmed down and the architecture awards have gathered dust.
- 103 -
- 104 -
- 105 -

Appendix 5. Free-text responses – Use of space

What would you improve about this library space?

- 1 Not enough seating for private study
- 2 Make children's area more child-friendly, more educational activities, lower fines for late returns
- 3 Seeing the café open
- 4 -
- 5 -
- 6 Children's area cornered off
- 7 Private and quiet study space: extend the number of seats and maybe make it really separate from the rest of the library so it is quieter
- 8 I would minimise the amount of noise coming from the children's reading groups as the sound is unbearable when you try to study in the adult study area
- 9 Upstairs adult study workstations are sloping. Make them flat
- 10 More quiet, Sunday opening hours are quite short
- 11 -
- 12 -
- 13 Offer screening/talks amongst its events
- 14 -
- 15 Nothing - it's perfect
- 16 -
- 17 They need to rejig the area near the newspapers for quiet reading. More comfy seating near the café to create more of a Starbucks atmosphere either by café or upstairs
- 18 Bigger desks and tables in certain areas. Children make far too much noise! I would change the layout for the kids' section
- 19 Make a clear distinction between a library and a youth centre. I believe libraries should be a place primarily for study and learning. If children or adults are using it as a place to meet, chat and play online games, this should be discouraged
- 20 More quiet study seats. The central staircase takes too much space. That is detrimental of reading space. Re-open the meeting tables available for chatting in the lower floor
- 21 The lighting for reading, especially in wintertime is not good around the seating area. But the large windows on a good bright day are great
- 22 -

- 23 I would provide more quiet areas
- 24 More learning English books
- 25 -
- 26 More study spaces as they are usually full early on in the day. The café has now gone and this was a good feature of the library
- 27 Should separate children's zone because it is very noisy
- 28 I would improve it with older books
- 29 More space for quiet areas. More books
- 30 Nothing. I wouldn't change anything
- 31 -
- 32 -
- 33 -
- 34 Make sure the café remains. Stop the sewage smell by the entrance
- 35 I think the library should be quieter
- 36 Perhaps having a different room for the children's activities, not in the foyer of the library (NB there was a drumming activity in the downstairs foyer on this day)
- 37 -
- 38 -
- 39 -
- 40 Reduce noise from the children's area
- 41 -
- 42 There's some loud music playing nearby - I'd quiet that down! More study desks. Lovely library though!
- 43 Subscribe to better journals like The New Yorker, Bloomberg Businessweek, London Review of Books
- 44 More table and chairs in locations with natural light. More quiet areas to be designated
- 45 -
- 46 Wider range of materials possibly. Providing access to resources is the library's main function
- 47 More private space to study/more tables. Sometimes it is too noisy
- 48 -
- 49 -
- 50 More space to study. More comfortable chairs

- 51 It is my first time visiting this particular library, and I'm not sure if this is standard capacity level, but I think more work areas with tables and chairs and less computers would be welcomed for me
- 52 -
- 53 More study spaces and quiet areas. Café which serves the community better, more interested in being a friendly community space/hub. Children's area should be more defined. But it is a library which invests in books which is rare for a modern library
- 54 I'm happy with it
- 55 Stronger lighting around the windows. Lower fines for late book returns
- 57 More seating areas
- 58 Maybe some more lounge areas
- 59 -
- 61 More classes for adults. It should be a place for learning. It's hard to judge though as I'm only visiting
- 62 Noise level brought down
- 63 -
- 64 Make more space for studying. Make a book resource connect network
- 65 The natural light (I don't like having the window behind), more green outside, maybe a terrace or a roof garden (if possible)
- 66 Make the children's areas more closed. Keep it quiet. Set up telephone talking areas.
- 67 More computers and desks to study. They are so busy all the time!
- 68 -
- 69 Bring back the café
- 70 -
- 71 More quiet space, not so close to the kids' space, more seating with view
- 72 Open up roof space in summer for events or social space
- 73 I'd suggest that they should prepare to have much more studying desks and seats
- 74 More study space, more seating upstairs
- 76 -
- 77 -
- 78 -
- 79 -
- 80 -

- 81 -
- 82 -
- 83 Soundproof the study area
- 84 Opening times, price for hire of meeting spaces to decrease for returning parties
- 85 More tables/desks for study
- 86 More desks, private work space
- 87 -
- 88 -
- 89 Have a quiet room - every time somebody talks, they get kicked out
- 90 Perhaps a few more areas to work/study at
- 91 The children should be enclosed in order to minimise noise/distraction for those doing serious academic research/reading
- 92 -
- 93 -
- 94 It would be nice if the café were open
- 95 More time on computers as the 1 hour maximum per day is not enough if you need to study or do something needing more time
- 96 -
- 97 I would not have made it open-plan
- 98 Have a silent study room
- 99 Improve children's space i.e. more interesting murals etc. Large first floor display of recent books
- 100 -
- 101 Have a contained children's section. Have a contained study space
- 102 A joined-up consultation that takes the opinions of both staff and public into account and acts upon it. Having an architect with a record of building libraries, and then consulting with staff about plans
- 103 Not much really
- 104 -
- 105 -